

HWC Engineering

Attitude of Respect Fuels Firm Growth

By Katie Coffin

The office is silent as Ed Jolliffe shows me around HWC Engineering's Indianapolis headquarters.

He needn't talk over the bouncing of ping pong balls, the buzzing of a kegerator or any of the "hip" amenities you might find at some companies on the Best Places to Work in Indiana list. But that silence exudes quiet confidence in an environment immersed in productivity and quality.

When I ask the president and majority owner about fun perks, Jolliffe chuckles and quips, "We have free coffee!"

So what is it about this full-service design firm that attracts engineers away from other companies and retains many of them for the long haul?

Quite simply, it's an atmosphere of respect. HWC's culture transcends surface-level luxuries and encompasses qualities that are much deeper: trust, support and balance.

"It feels more like a family than a business," remarks Jon Day, construction inspection services manager. "We're a good-sized company to maintain our growth, but it's not so big that we're just names on a piece of paper. (The managers) truly, genuinely care that you're happy here."

Engineering growth

Like George and Louise in the iconic sitcom *The Jeffersons*, HWC is literally and figuratively "movin' on up."

The business has grown rapidly since Jolliffe took over in 2009 – expanding from 50 employees to more than 80 currently – and is bursting at the seams in its current space. Two people occupy a cubicle intended for one, and design plans and other materials fill desk and counter space. For now, Jolliffe qualifies this as a "good problem."

In June, HWC will pack up its eighth-floor suite on Delaware Street and settle into the top floor of the BMO Plaza where space will be ample. The staff even held a festive "Purge Party" – complete with pizza and cake – to clean the office.

HWC was born in the 1990s when David Hannum, Ralph Wagle and Michael Cline collaborated to offer civil engineering services to clients in Terre Haute. Since then, it has expanded its scope of work and opened offices in Indianapolis, Scottsburg, Lafayette and Muncie, with a new location slated to launch in New Albany.

Today, HWC's areas of expertise include water resources, transportation, site engineering, planning, landscape architecture and program management. Pictures of completed projects line the office, communicating a sense of pride in the accomplishments in communities around the state.

In 2015, HWC received two State Finalist Awards for engineering excellence from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Indiana. The awards were made in recognition of Seashore Waterpark in Lebanon and the Village Promenade in Muncie.

Jolliffe credits a strong business development team with finding more work for the company, especially in Central Indiana.

"I believe you have to grow to survive," Jolliffe states bluntly. "I like to grow about 10% per year. It doesn't always work out that way – sometimes it's 20%. Sometimes it's 5%. It gives more people the chance to advance and (creates opportunities for) bigger projects."

"(The staff) is a great cohesive group. I enjoy what I do, and I enjoy helping young people grow. That's my job now; it's about developing a team."

Quiet but mighty

Jon Query is a product of HWC's dedication to developing and mentoring its staff.

He began his tenure with the organization as a college intern and subsequently was hired as a full-time project engineer in the Terre Haute office. Now, he's a project manager in

Indianapolis, overseeing assignments from the planning stage through design and into construction.

"Everyone wants to have the chance to grow and move up the ladder with their job," Query acknowledges. "(HWC) is a great place to work, and I am comfortable staying here and continuing my career here."

Day, who was promoted into a managerial role in January, adds: "There's no fear of teaching the younger people how to be good managers because (HWC leadership) wants to mentor them."

Despite HWC being a private company, Jolliffe says he's open with its financials, holding an annual meeting where employees convene for a "state of the company" so they understand the vision. Employees receive additional financial rewards after successful years.

"I feel like we need to share information with employees when we do well," Jolliffe recognizes. "All we have is intellectual property. These people make it happen, so we try to keep them informed."

The company also openly shares its time and resources in community service events organized by the HWC Giving group.

For about two years, HWC employees have served lunch for the homeless and those in need supported by the Wheeler Mission. Some employees are involved with Engineers Without Borders, a humanitarian group that partners with developing communities

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Once a month HWC employees at the Indianapolis office volunteer at Wheeler Mission. On a typical day, the mission serves about 150 men for lunch.

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worldwide in order to improve their quality of life.

“The communities all give us work, so we think we should invest in the communities where we work,” Jolliffe declares.

Staff also volunteers its time with high school students to help cultivate the next generation of engineers. There is a talent shortage in civil engineering, and Jolliffe says it’s a “struggle” to find workers.

“We want to create a nice atmosphere and culture where we have very little turnover,” he concludes. “It’s all about balance. Everyone works hard, but I want them to be able to go home to a baseball game when they can. We have a very flexible work schedule and just try to create an environment where we respect each other. I think our people believe that and feel that respect. That’s important to keep good people.”



There will be plenty of workspace when HWC moves to the top floor of the BMO Plaza in downtown Indianapolis at the end of June.

RESOURCE: HWC Engineering at www.hwcengineering.com