

Midwest Mole

Rising to the Challenge

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Danielle Stigall joined Midwest Mole, a trenchless technology company that provides a full range of underground services, just six months ago. But you'd never guess it.

She has an easy rapport with colleagues, a sound grasp on the business and a passion for its culture.

That's the way it works at Midwest Mole, which was founded in 1982. In an atmosphere in which "everybody cares about one another," employees are family. And they're driven – from the start – to succeed.

Prior to her arrival as director of human resources, the organization didn't have a formal HR department.

"In the short time she's been here, she's made such a significant impact," remarks vice president of risk management Gary Gagliardi. "People don't like change, so to start something new and to create your own department and to do it in the professional way she's done it – it's been phenomenal."

As the duo treats me to a tour of the Greenfield headquarters, it's clear that hard work, humility and humor are among the keys to Midwest Mole's longevity.

'Something new every day'

Walls are bathed in bright colors and sprinkled with homages to employee training, wellness and community service.

Feisty Joanne Edwards looks up from her desk with a grin.

"She was here when we made the (Best Places) list (in 2009)," Stigall notes.

A 22-year veteran of Midwest Mole, Edwards cites the family-oriented atmosphere and diverse opportunities as reasons she's stayed.

"We face a lot of challenges," asserts the company controller. "I think everybody is up to a good challenge at times. Especially with the projects that we work (on) all over the United States. We're currently registered in like 24 states. It's a challenge for me to stay current with all of that at any given time."

Accounting manager Dee Dellacca has nearly three years at Midwest Mole under her belt. She relishes the variety.

"I came from the health care industry as well as owning my own business. ... I knew nothing about construction other than there were safety rules," she jokes. "Everybody's been very open to teach and to share their knowledge. That's what's amazing."

"When we have our annual meeting, like last year, it was so cool to watch our field guys teach each other what they were doing with the different boring (creating a hole) or safety things they were doing out in the garage."

'Dig Deep, Be Healthy'

Adorning a wall is a list of supported charities, such as Little Wish Foundation, Old Bethel Food Pantry and American Cancer Society.

"We just joined Relay for Life," Stigall comments. "The Relay is a good cause as well because we have people join the team and do the relay together."

Another hallway wall contains two striking mantras – 'Dig Deep' and 'Be Healthy' – painted in bold, black letters. Just above is a big-screen television displaying an office mobility routine. Nearby is the on-site gym. The walls are bright orange. Equipment beckons.

"This is where (the personal trainer) tortures everybody," Gagliardi quips. "She comes out twice a week and whoever can make the class attends."

Additional perks include health screenings, a weekly yoga class, monthly luncheon, and free healthy beverages and snacks. There's also a corporate chaplain.

"It's all confidential, of course," Gagliardi emphasizes. "If we recognize that somebody may need (assistance), we'll steer (the corporate chaplain) in their direction and he takes it from there."

Moley Money, music and elephants

Ready to earn Moley Money?

"It's \$50 and it's for jobs well done. It sounds kind of hokey, but we send everybody a birthday card with cash in it. A lot of people say, 'That's really cool. Nobody's ever done that for me – maybe not since I was 10 and grandma sent \$5 in the mail,'" declares president Jason Miller with a good-natured laugh.

Monthly birthday and anniversary celebrations are face to face.

"They throw one lunch for everyone just to say, 'Thank you' and, 'We recognize you,'" imparts estimating administrator Amy Webster.

She notes that on other occasions, CEO Dan Liotti entertains the team with food and festivities.

"Dan, once a year when it's warm out, will bring out the grill and his trailer and put on music. We'll do fun things out there like human foosball and frisbee golf. Just because!"

Gagliardi chimes in: "We also take the trailer to the job sites sometimes. We always take the guys out to lunch and dinner."

Employee appreciation is the theme for Midwest Mole's 2018 company meeting. Staff and their entire family are invited to the



Safety is paramount at Midwest Mole. The trenchless technology company will expand its Greenfield headquarters this year and plans are underway to establish an office in Washington, D.C.

three-day event. Among the activities are an elephant spa, feeding a giraffe, golf tournament and horseback riding.

Safety stats

Music and machinery reverberate in the maintenance area.

“We do our own maintenance on all of our equipment. We also have a trucking division. We have three full-time professional drivers. These are the types of rigs they use,” observes Gagliardi, gesturing to equipment.

Moments later, mechanic Brandon O’Brien fires up a plasma cutter. After completing the task, he points out how every day on the job is different – something he enjoys.

“You kind of have to figure everything out as we go pretty much. Nothing’s the same here.”

One constant is an emphasis on safety.

“We’ve gone four consecutive years without any serious injuries, which we’re very proud of,” Gagliardi declares. “I give all of the credit to the foremen because I put the responsibility on them.”

Midwest Mole’s preventative care program, for instance, illustrates the company’s commitment to team members.



“We have the estimating pit in the middle ... and everyone that’s kind of in this department, all of their doors open to that,” notes estimating administrator Amy Webster. “It forms us as a group here. We all know what’s going on here and gather.” Also shown are senior estimator Ryan Barkdull (center) and president Jason Miller.

“It doesn’t matter if they’ve been here a day or 100 years,” Gagliardi asserts. “At the first sign of any back pain, they contact me, who sets them up with a chiropractor near where they’re working or near their home. They don’t pay for anything.

“Our company’s philosophy in safety is

that we care about everybody. Caring is to me the key to success in safety. If you don’t care about them, they’re not going to care about themselves. You have to walk the walk. You just can’t give it lip service – because they can see through that. We demonstrate it. We show it all the time.”

RESOURCE: Midwest Mole at www.midwestmole.com



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