

Kalenborn Abresist Corporation

Manufacturing Champ Steps Up

By Matt Ottinger and Rebecca Patrick

This Urbana-based employer may be making its debut on the Best Places to Work in Indiana list, but the Kalenborn Abresist Corporation is no stranger to earning high recognition for its culture. The maker claimed the No. 1 spot on the Indiana Chamber's Best Places to Work in Manufacturing list three years running.

A division of a German company (Kalenborn International) that is over 100 years old, the Indiana operation launched in 1979. Kalenborn Abresist designs, manufactures, delivers and installs wear-resistant linings for hydraulic and pneumatic conveyor components or pipes.

The bulk of the business today is evenly distributed in industries like steel mining, cement, power generation and building materials. The organization also has leveraged 3D scanning to become extremely efficient – and set itself apart with customers.

"It takes a million points of data in a second, so it can be sitting on the floor and take a picture of a complete piping model in seconds, where we used to have to climb up scaffolding," shares President Craig Frendewey, noting the process in the past could be both dangerous and tenuous. "This way, we can do in an hour what would take us maybe three days before."

No egos

As the company has maximized efficiency to enhance revenues, it's made a point to use its success to bolster the workplace environment and share the proverbial wealth.

Frendewey came to Kalenborn 12 years ago and took over as president in 2017. He cites his colleagues having "no ego" collectively as paving the way for true collaboration.

"They work for each other, and I think that's because we recognize each person's contribution and we thank them," he remarks. "We encourage their heart when they do something that is really essential in us being successful."

A "deep culture of accountability" is also a foundational component of Kalenborn's unique standing as an employee-friendly workplace.

"Anyone who's been a member of a

family realizes that we have to be accountable to each other to be successful, so I can't make somebody accountable and then not be accountable to them," Frendewey imparts.

He adds that a major element of accountability is availability.

"We have a really collaborative group, and my door is open all the time."

Investing in people

Amenities for Kalenborn's staff feature catered lunches once a week, as well as activities like outings at Indiana Beach and Fort Wayne TinCaps baseball games.

Big tangible benefits include a contribution of \$2,000 to staffers' health savings accounts and meaningful contributions to 401(k) retirement savings.

For Cody King, a draftsman and single father who's been at Kalenborn for a year and a half, the health benefits package is quite helpful.

"They just invest in you. They believe in you," King reports. "They give you a shot to be yourself, and it's very rewarding to see the work you do impact the company in a positive way."

King also appreciates that Kalenborn covers training to help its workers be the best they can be.

"There's room to grow. It's very clear that you're not stationed in one area," he offers. "If you can show that you're willing, there are definitely spots where you can learn in different areas."

Team is the dream

Scott Dietrich started in the welding department in 1989 and has worked his way up to the chief operating officer position.

"I was the guy with two kids and a mortgage, and I was just looking for an opportunity," he reflects. "And at the time, it was because they had free health insurance."

He credits his work family as consistently building an environment of care for one another through the years. In fact, Dietrich recalls a time when an employee's car broke down at a restaurant in Wabash. The employee called one colleague, and ultimately many of his fellow workers arrived to make sure he could get home.

"He was even looking around going, 'Hey, it looks like we're having a Kalenborn meeting down here,'" Dietrich quips. "I just thought it was a great statement. ... (The company's) different in that way; we feel like we're watching out for each other."



Spending time together at the company picnic is one way team camaraderie is fostered.



Accountability is a big part of Kalenborn’s culture but so too is making time for fun – including an annual amusement park trip.

Staff accountant Randi Knotts has been with the organization for about a year and has seen that caring dynamic in action.

“What stood out for me was the culture overall; it’s kind of like a family around here and everyone is very helpful,” Knotts shares. “Everyone was really eager to help me out when I first started and show me the ropes.”

King concurs that the secret to Kalenborn’s success is team-oriented thinking. He illustrates how his own department operates as an example.

“We work together as a group and we share the knowledge,” he relays, mentioning the recent acquisition of 3D modeling software. “If I learn something in that training, I share it with the guys and vice versa, so I don’t feel singled out as in, ‘This job file is mine’; it’s a group up there.”

Hard to say goodbye

Dietrich remembers seeing a woman in town who had an interest in working at Kalenborn but had a resigned tone because she knew current staffers rarely move on.

“We only hire so many people over a five-year period because nobody wants to leave the facility,” he remarks. “That’s what really shows me the integrity is here. People don’t quit Kalenborn or leave for another opportunity.

“The last four or five people that have left here were because they retired. And we usually have a retirement party at the end of a person’s time in this facility.”

Freundewey says “it’s easy to get emotional” when thinking about the company, especially as he forecasts his own retirement several years in the future.

“These are the greatest people I’ve ever worked for and alongside in my professional career,” he concludes. “They’re incredible people who respect each other in a way that I couldn’t believe an organization could do.”

RESOURCE: Kalenborn Abresist Corporation, at www.kalenborn.us

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