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New Orleans CityBusiness

2012 Best Places to Work

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Top: Adams and Reese employees, from left, Morris Green Sr., Bernie Alsobrook, Ann Wallace, Deborah Roven, Gail Rankins, Jeffery Bentivegna and Linda Soileau. Photo by Frank Aymami

Bottom: Ericksen, Krentel & LaPorte employees, from left, Debbie Morgan, Joseph Daher, Claude Silverman, Jeremy Thibodeaux and Monica Landry. Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Published by
New Orleans Publishing Group
3445 North Causeway Blvd., Ste. 901
Metairie, LA 70002

Publisher: Lisa Blossman
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Christian Moises

Respect, teamwork and access to management are the top three terms employees used to describe the 2012 Best Places to Work.

They're also three of the various factors that the CityBusiness selection committee has used to determine the best places to work for the past 10 years.

While it's impossible to list all the tangible and intangible perks this year's Best Places provide for their employees, the following profiles and lists outline why people want to work at these companies.

To determine its honorees, CityBusiness uses a scoring system based on benefits including salary, health care, paid time off and average length of employment. In addition, employees at the nominated companies were asked to complete a survey that allowed us to gauge the workplace culture and staff morale to determine the final cut.

A handful of companies submitted a nomination but did not want to submit a survey to their employees, resulting in disqualification.

Survey responses are not released to the public and are only used to complete the selection process. But whether it's to be considered a Best Place to Work or just allowing employees to voice their opinions — good or bad — knowing what your staff needs to remain productive and happy is vital to a company's bottom line.

The management of the 2012 Best Places to Work understands that going above and beyond standard company benefits guide by offering intangible perks such as team-building and morale-boosting programs and fun office activities. They recognize that keeping their employees happy helps boost their bottom line.

The awards go to 35 large and 15 small businesses. Based on the U.S. Small Business Administration's definition, large businesses have 50 or more employees. Companies that are part of larger corporations but have fewer than 50 New Orleans employees fall under

continued on next page

Respondents by age

Of the 5,451 respondents who completed the 2012 Best Places to Work employee satisfaction survey as part of the nomination process, the largest portion were 50 and older:

18-25	7.5 percent
26-33	21.5 percent
34-40	15.7 percent
40-50	24.6 percent
50 and older	30.7 percent

INTRODUCTION

continued from previous page

the large businesses category.

Leading this year's large companies are: 1. Adams and Reese 2. First NBC Bank and 3. Landis Construction. The top small companies are: 1. Ericksen Krentel and LaPorte 2. Gillis, Ellis and Baker Inc., and, tied for third, Blitch Knevel Architects and Deveney Communication.

A dozen newcomers joined this year's honorees: DCL Mooring and Rigging, Gillis Ellis and Baker Inc., Greater New Orleans Inc., Hyatt Regency New Orleans, Infinity Engineering Consultants, Kean Miller, Point Eight Power, Pullen Air Conditioning, Ryan Gootee General Contractors, Solomon Group, Stress Engineering Services Inc., Trigon Associates and TurboSquid.

One company — Zehnder Communications — has made the list every year since the publication's inception in 2003.

Congratulations to the 2012 Best Places to Work.•

News Editor Christian Moises can be reached at 293-9249 or at christian.moises@nopg.com.

Measuring up

The Best Places to Work nomination process includes a satisfaction survey sent to the employees of all nominated companies. CityBusiness analyzed the aspects most important to employees and found that "keeping pace with industry change" rated the highest among the satisfiers, followed closely by salary and other tangible benefits and a spirit of teamwork. The least important factor was personal time away from work. Here's how the 5,451 respondents rated the all of the factors used to measure the Best Places to Work:

	Excellent	Above average	Average	Below average	Poor
Keeping pace with industry change	40.7%	27.6%	22.5%	4.9%	4.2%
Tangible benefits (salary, 401(k), health care, etc.)	40.3%	26.3%	23.8%	5.4%	4.2%
Spirit of teamwork	39.5%	27.2%	20.1%	6.6%	6.6%
Emphasis on achieving goals	38%	30.9%	21.8%	4.8%4	4.7%
Chances you'll retire with this company	35.7%	23.5%	22.6%	7%	11.2%
Use of employees' skills and experience	35.1%	29.6%	23.7%	6.4%	5.2%
Emphasis on personal development	34%	27.5%	24.3%	7.2%	7%
Diversity at the workplace	33.8%	27.4%	29.4%	5.2%	4.2%
Employee autonomy and independence	32.7%	31.4%	24.6%	5.9%	5.3%
Recognition of employee job performance	32.1%	28%	24.3%	8.3%	7.3%
How well company "practices what it preaches"	31.2%	27.3%	23.8%	8.3%	9.4%
Communication between employees and management	30.9%	29.9%	22.8%	8.1%	8.3%
Seeking out and implementing employee ideas	30%	29.7%	25.3%	8.6%	6.4%
How well employer solves problems in the workplace	29.5%	28.3%	24.9%	8.8%	8.6%
Intangible benefits (fun activities, game nights, etc.)	28.9%	22.6%	26.7%	12.1%	9.7%
Employee morale	28.6%	27.7%	27.3%	8.8%	8.4%
Recognizing employee expectations	27.8%	27.7%	27.3%	8.8%	8.4%
Chances for advancement	25%	26.8%	30.5%	9.2%	8.5%
Emphasis on personal time away from work	24.1%	26.2%	34%	8.2%	7.5%

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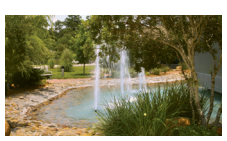

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Congratulations to the companies that have made the past 10 years of Best Places to Work lists by putting their employees first.

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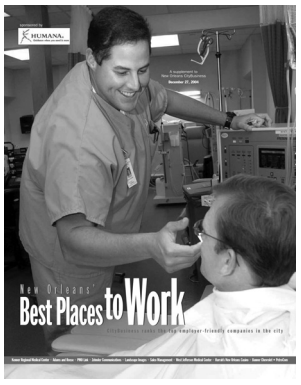
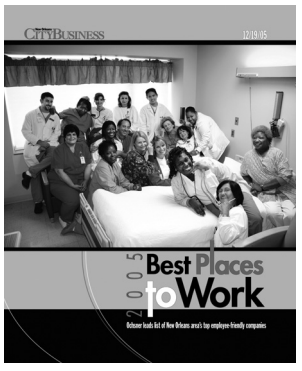
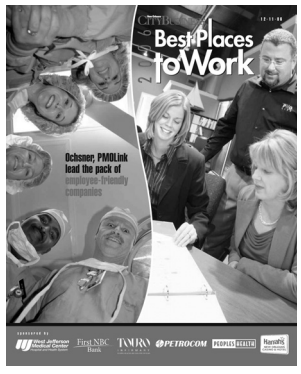


2004



2005



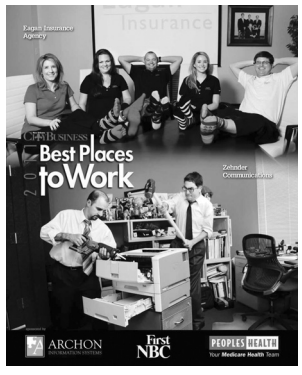
2006

2007

2008

2009

2010



2011

2012

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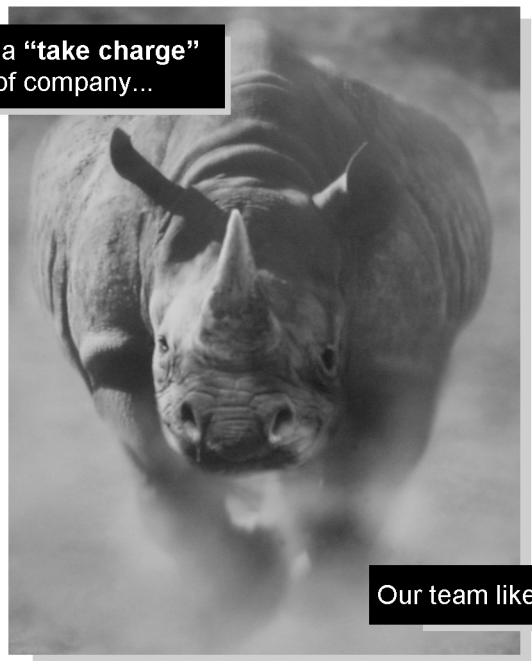

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Counterclockwise from top left: Morris Green Sr., Bernie Alsobrook, Ann Wallace, Deborah Rouen, Gail Rankins, Jeffery Bentivegna and Linda Soileau.

NINE-TIME HONOREE

Adams and Reese

1

Law firms don't usually top the list of fun and exciting places to work. But for the uninitiated, New Orleans-based Adams and Reese is defying the stereotype of being a classic buttoned-down business. Despite its size and reputation, the firm is making a name for itself among area attorneys as a place where the caseload is as exciting as the work environment.

"This is not a formal place," said Paige Sensenbrenner, who leads the firm's New Orleans office and has been with Adams and Reese for almost three decades. "I started with the firm straight out of law school, and I've been here ever since."

Part of what makes working for the firm so exciting, Sensenbrenner said, is its style of management.

"Things are very democratic here," he said. "We don't have an old guy sitting in the back telling everyone what to do. We have an executive committee, but the leadership on that committee changes."

One of the most telling things about Adams and Reese, Sensenbrenner said, is that there hasn't been a group of lawyers in the firm's history that has broken off to form another organization.

"That stands out in the field of law, and it means that people are comfortable working here. They feel respected and believe their work has meaning."

Lisa Weeks, a regional office manager who joined the company nine months ago, said there's an open-door style of management.

"There's a sense of balance and an egalitarian approach to management," Weeks said. "There's always a constant push to stay in touch. People want to know what's going on with you." Weeks said the firm already has a reputation for employing skilled litigators, but its approach to employee relations is what helps set it apart.

Frank Liantonio, a partner in the litigation group, said the firm's democratic approach extends to everyone involved.

"I've been here since 1988 and it doesn't matter if you're the most senior partner or the lowest-ranking individual at the firm," Liantonio said. "People are encouraged to share their ideas and give input. That's because the senior management team truly cares about people and wants them to succeed in their careers."

Liantonio said Adams and Reese is concerned about its people, but management also encourages staff to be active in the community.

"We've instituted what we call our HUGS Program, which stands for hope, understanding, giving and sharing," he said. "We use it to coordinate our volunteer activities and recognize employees who have done an outstanding job by working with a particular charity or nonprofit organization."

Liantonio, who leads the New Orleans branch of the Susan G. Komen cancer foundation, said the firm's commit-

Nature of business: Law firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 189 locally; 602 firmwide
Average starting salary: $38,000 for staff; $100,000 for attorneys
Median salary: $50,000 for staff; $200,000 for attorneys
Average time of employment: 11 years
Health care benefits: 75 percent covered; dental and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: One month after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, telecommuting, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 34 days
Website: www.adamsandreese.com

ment to area causes and charities is an extension of the organization's concern for its staff members.

"We've been a leader in providing resources to organizations and people who need it," he said. "We're not just a company."

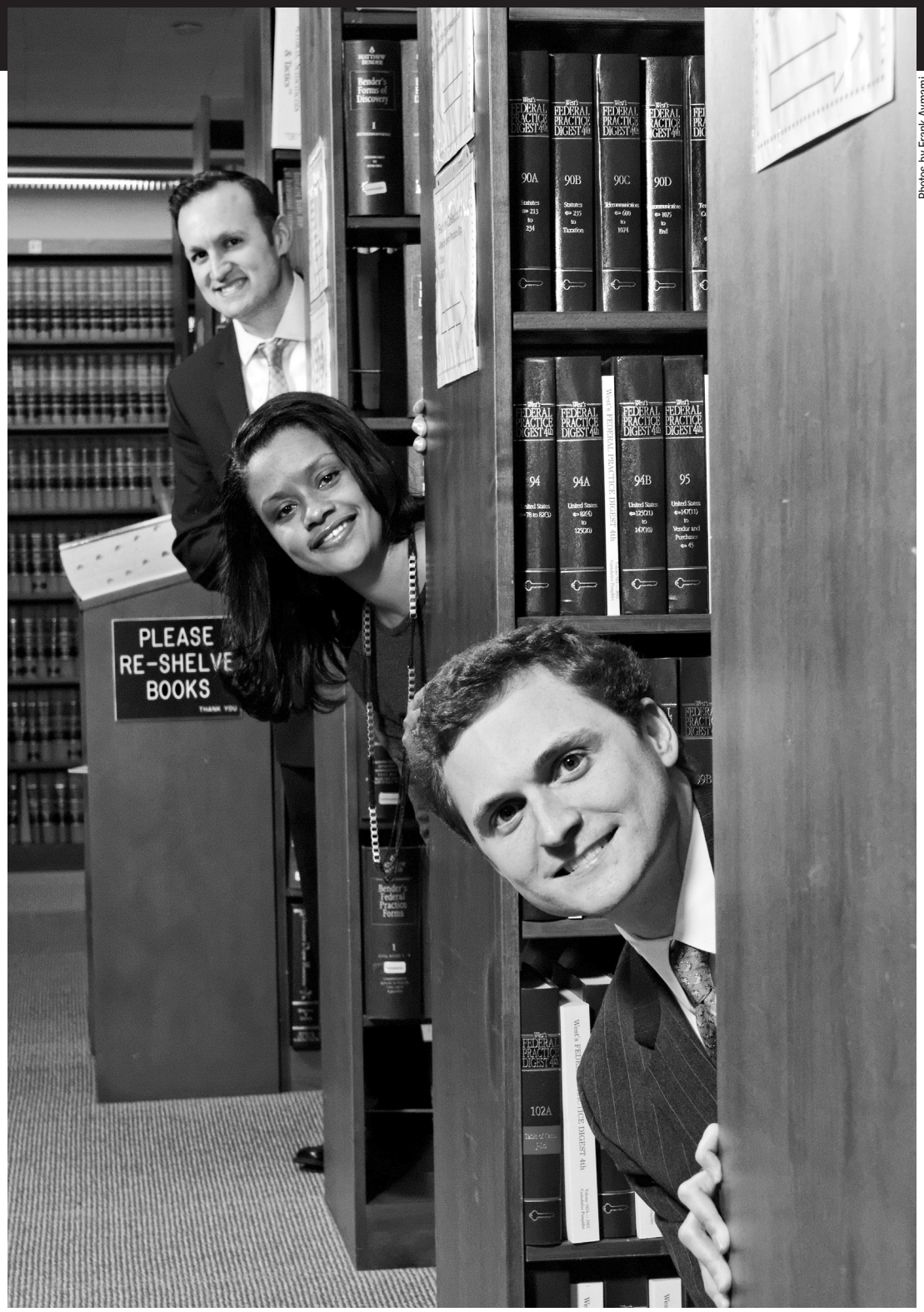
The feeling of being more than a employee became very apparent for legal assistant Lisa Wallace after Hurricane Katrina. Wallace, who has been with the firm for 14 years, remembers the kindness of her colleagues.

"We, of course, had lost a lot," Wallace said. "But I remember coworkers from other offices who just sent us everything you can imagine we might need from toiletries, to household (items), to clothes. We even had support seminars after Katrina to help us through the process."•

— Mason Harrison

Photos by Frank Aymami

Photos by Frank Aymami



Top: Attorneys Lee Reid and Lauren Tafaro take a break in the Attorney's Lounge. Bottom: Jaimmé Collins leads a diversity meeting.

Top: From front: Attorneys David Coons, Jaimmé Collins and Ira Gonzalez in the library. Bottom: From left: Elizabeth Zenon, Lisa Weeks, Paige Sensenbrenner and Lynette Johnson.

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Vickie Chiasson tags Rodney Crosby as he slides safely to home plate.

FIVE-TIME HONOREE

First NBC Bank

2

When employees of First NBC Bank start talking about why they love their jobs, it doesn't take long for them to mention their respect and fondness for their boss, president and CEO Ashton Ryan.

Ed Marshall, senior vice president and director of marketing and public relations, touts Ryan's hands-off management style.

"We are left to handle the work that we are supposed to do," Marshall said. "We don't have to check with the president because he hires you based on your work ethic and your responsibility and your ability to take charge."

The entire staff, not just upper management, participates in regularly scheduled meetings with Ryan, who updates them on the bank's accomplishments and plans.

"First NBC and Mr. Ryan make sure that all employees are plugged into the organization in terms of the path that we're on," said Jeff Lally, vice president and talent development manager, who joined the bank in December 2011.

Theresa Harris, vice president and branch manager of the Railroad Avenue branch in Hammond, arrived in November 2011 when First NBC acquired Central Progressive Bank. She described her new workplace as a relaxed environment and said being a small community bank helps foster an atmosphere in which co-workers at all levels are comfortable communicating with one another.

"If you were at the company picnic, I don't think you would be too nervous walking up to … our CEO and telling him hello," Harris said. "It would be a little different if we were working for a large organization."

Among First NBC's most popular benefits is its retirement plan contribution to all full-time employees. The bank contributes 4 percent of the salaries of all employees scheduled for 1,000 or more hours per year, whether or not the employee opts to participate in the plan.

Nature of business: Banking
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 406
Average starting salary: $50,184
Median salary: $41,700
Average time of employment: 3.7 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescriptions plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 38 days
Website: www.firstnbcbank.com

"So even people who are not able to put a lot away can still feel comfortable and secure that something is going to be there when it's time to retire," Harris said.

The bank has several employee recognition programs in place. At the annual Retail Rally, awards are handed out for achievements such as reaching sales goals, demonstrating outstanding customer service and producing well-done compliance reports. The quarterly First in Service Awards offer more employees a chance for the spotlight, along with the Great Ideas Contributor Award and the Community Involvement Employee of the Year Award, through which the bank makes a donation to the recipient's charity of choice.

First NBC employees take part in a summer bowl-a-thon to raise money for Junior Achievement.

"It almost seems like on a weekly basis there are communications coming out about community opportunities and where people can help," Lally said.•

— Sonya Stinson

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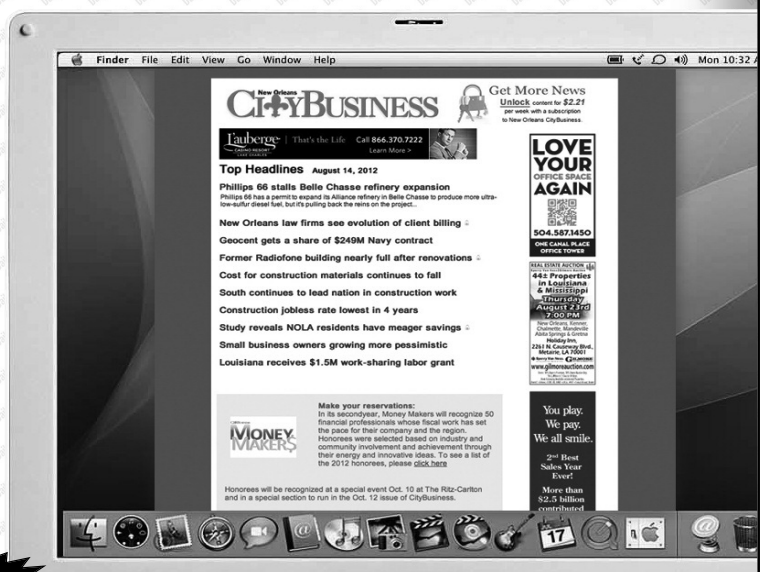

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TWO-TIME HONOREE

3

Landis Construction

Photo by Frank Aymami

Seated, from left: Ryan Dufrene, Lauren Barthelemy and Cindy Castille. Standing: Jeffry Blady, David Yinger and Scott Sandberg at the former American Coffee Co. building on Magazine Street.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, Landis Construction slips into summer hours, closing early on Fridays. The idea didn't come from upper management, though.

"An employee came to us and suggested that we research it," said Jim Lewis, executive vice president and chief operating officer. "At first we were skeptical about how it would work in the construction business. But we gave it a shot, and it's become a popular thing."

If employees can influence office policy, then managers are given "a lot of authority to manage contracts," Lewis said. "We create an atmosphere where they're comfortable making decisions."

It's also an environment where a relatively new employee can earn a promotion. Mary Katherine Bruce first interviewed for an estimating job and was promoted to project engineer in nine months.

"Even though the project engineer job wasn't available (initially), I wanted to work so badly with Landis that I took it," Bruce said. "I knew I'd get the proper training and a safe time to learn and grow."

Bruce pays that guidance forward through the ACE Mentor Program, which connects professionals with high school students planning careers in architecture, engineering or construction. Landis has been involved with ACE for the past two years, Bruce said.

Fittingly, Landis is headquartered in a renovated century-old building that's "beautiful and nicely designed," Bruce said. For her, a comfortable workplace means plenty of natural light and showers onsite for employees who bike to the office.

It's a little more rugged in the field, and employees working there are rewarded for safety days with pay, "if you work safe and don't lose time," said Jim "Jimbo" Perry, a carpenter with Landis who also handles foreman duties on numerous jobs.

Nature of business: General contractor
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 90
Average starting salary: $37,500 for hourly; $45,000 for salaried
Median salary: $42,000 for hourly; $55,000 for salaried
Average time of employment: 8 years
Health care benefits: 99 percent; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 22 - 32 days
Website: www.landisllc.com

Like other Landis employees in the field, Perry can earn up to four paid safety days a year, and they're bankable, so employees who earn them can take them all at once.

"That's pretty big," Perry said. "You don't find that in other companies. On job sites, I meet a lot of people. … That's how I know we have a pretty good situation here."

While he likes the extra vacation days, Perry also pointed out that Landis always has work for him, which can't always be assumed in the construction business.

Perry appreciates the company's trust in him, especially since he had little experience when he was first hired as a carpenter's helper.

"I was old to be starting a new career, but they took a chance on me, gave me a shot," Perry said. "That's all I asked for."•

— Anne Berry

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Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Richard Noggerath, Kevin Block, Jay Otillio, Michael Sabatini and Kelli Yeats take a break during Audubon Engineering's Thanksgiving celebration dessert contest.

EIGHT-TIME HONOREE

Audubon Engineering Co.

Age should be an opportunity, not a handicap. So goes the thinking at Audubon Engineering Co., which has built its work force by mining talent and transforming those individuals into successful engineers.

Through its Graduate Opportunities in Leadership in Development (GOLD) program, the firm trains and mentors new engineers who are just out of school and still building their expertise.

"It's rewarding for them because they get to understand what we're doing and why we're doing it at a young age," said Denis Taylor, co-founder and managing partner of the firm.

Toby Thevenot joined Audubon Engineering right after graduating college and said he was immediately given opportunities he might not have received elsewhere. Shortly after the firm hired him in 2006, his managers assigned him to one of Audubon's larger projects and tasked him with some of its on-site responsibilities.

"At the time, I didn't realize it, but it was a unique opportunity that most young engineers don't normally find themselves in," Thevenot said. "With most other companies, I don't think someone in my position at that time would have been given that opportunity."

Today, Thevenot is an electrical and instrument engineering manager and oversees a team of 16 engineers.

As a company servicing the energy industry, employees said Audubon has been able to keep its business strong even as the national economy has struggled. Through its onshore and offshore projects, the firm doubled its revenues and staff in the past year.

For Jim Schneider, a senior accountant who joined the firm in March, knowing management makes good decisions on where to invest has given him confidence in his new workplace.

Nature of business: Engineering
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 769
Average starting salary: $72,611 for staff; $102,074 for engineers
Median salary: $70,000 for staff; $104,000 for engineers
Average time of employment: 2 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after hire
Other perks: Day care options, employee recognition and assistance programs
Paid days off: 12 days
Website: www.audubon-engineering.com

"I like the fact that our company has a big presence in our market, and to me that's meant a lot," Schneider said.

In appreciation for employees' efforts toward meeting 2011 goals, the firm ran a "November to Remember" recognition program that involved daily prize drawings. Prizes included an iPad, a Kindle tablet, $1,000 and a 52-inch television. At the end of the month, two employees were selected at random to receive a 2011 Toyota Tundra and a 2011 Toyota Camry.

The firm also runs a peer recognition program throughout the year to recognize employees who go above and beyond. Awards include $500 and a preferred parking spot for a month. The firm also offers an employee referral program, which awards employees with up to $4,000 for bringing in top talent.

Audubon employees also have the option of working nine-hour days and taking every other Friday off. Alternately, employees can keep their five-day workweeks but leave early.

"We let people do whatever schedule fits their personal life best," Taylor said. "Our assets are our people, so we need to make sure our people are comfortable."•

—Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Photo by Frank Aymami

Denise DeAmore, seated, leads a daily chat about current events with Marilyn Naquin, left, Patrice Torres, Jamie McLemore, Nikki Frank, Kathleen Miller, Kent Lambert, Copper Hirsch, Tyler Weidlich, Anne Leche, Craig Caesar and Darla Nash.

THREE-TIME HONOREE

Baker Donelson

When Julie Meckstroth receives her quarterly video update from the CEO of Baker Donelson, it encourages her to perform well. She said it also shows her she's an important part of the law firm's operations.

"I came to Baker Donelson six years ago from a place where the head of the firm didn't even acknowledge my resignation after 21 years," said Meckstroth, a paralegal. "Baker Donelson truly wants employees to be happy and they work hard to make it happen."

In the past two years for example, the firm has been named a Fortune 100 company and to thank everyone, management gave all employees a floating holiday off work.

"They also express their gratitude for hard work by taking us to lunch and giving out prizes," Meckstroth said. "What's unique, however, is the CEO called me personally on my five-year anniversary with the firm. I don't know any business or firm where the CEO does that. It just made my day."

Lisa Bobbitt joined the firm four months ago as a legal secretary and said she has been very impressed with the friendliness of management. She also likes what she describes as a welcoming and positive work environment, as well as access to upgraded technology and reference materials.

"The approachability of management here is amazing, and it promotes a willingness to work hard and be more productive," Bobbitt said. "I've worked for small, medium and large firms in the area, and this one is just heads above the rest."

Roy Cheatwood, managing shareholder of the Baker Donelson's New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Mandeville offices, has been with the firm since it opened in 2004 with 18 lawyers. Today, there are more than 80 attorneys and 52 staff.

"We purposely create a culture that recognizes people as our most valuable asset," Cheatwood said. "It's about making people feel good and taking care of them. We also respect diversity and make sure our people are well suited and trained for their positions. … It's my job to lead and direct the staff and lawyers and make sure it's a culture we all enjoy. It goes from the bottom up and the top down."

Baker Donelson provides its work force with free parking and offers a partial 401(k) match for attorneys and detailed training programs for young lawyers on topics such as marketing and preparing to become a shareholder.

"We also support charitable events by purchasing tables (at events), and we encourage our younger staff and younger attorneys to attend so they can learn and take advantage of marketing opportunities," Cheatwood said. "Good lawyers that achieve success need a good team, and that includes everyone from the mailroom to staff, secretaries and the tech guy." •

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Law firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 98
Average starting salary: $54,163 for staff, $153,740 for attorneys
Median salary: $54,900 for staff, $178,750 for attorneys
Average time of employment: 4 years
Health care benefits: 92 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, day care options, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, employee wellness program
Paid days off: 29 days
Website: www.bakerdonelson.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Angela Franzer, left, and Jennifer Ezring "duke it out" for co-workers Brian Carter, left, David Pulido, Herb Brychta, Mike Falgout, John Ford Jr., Adrian Thibodeaux, Scott Shoemaker and Gregg Stagray.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

Booz Allen Hamilton

When Jennifer Ezring came to work for the New Orleans office of Booz Allen Hamilton in early 2010, she said she did so because she wanted to learn new things.

"I had been working for a smaller company that was flat and didn't have a lot of opportunities for professional and personal development," said Ezring, who serves as a lead associate and is in charge of the local office "But here just the opposite is the case. The opportunities are extensive. They put an incredible amount of value on professional development and growing both your skills and your knowledge of the work that you are doing."

For Angela Franzer, Booz Allen Hamilton's emphasis on growth means one thing.

"You can greatly broaden your skill in a very short amount of time," said Franzer, who came to Booz Allen Hamilton as a senior consultant two years ago. "If you have an interest in websites or communications or information-gathering, whatever it may be, there is no limit to the opportunities to get involved and learn new things."

With starting salaries pegged at $70,000 and the median salary at $91,000, Booz Allen has a tradition of being military-friendly and offers activation leave for employees called to service. In addition, those employees who are reactivated to military status are eligible for salary continuation for up to six months in a 12-month period.

"That kind of support matters," said Adrian Thibodeaux, a Booz Allen associate and retired Marine Corps master sergeant.

That support is multi-dimensional.

Hurricane Isaac flooded Thibodeaux's home, and he said the response from coworkers was instantaneous.

"After that happened, I can't tell you the number of emails and phone calls I got from other people who work here, asking if there was anything that I needed," he said.

Nature of business: Consulting/professional services
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 32 locally; 24,000 companywide
Average starting salary: $70,000
Median salary: $91,000
Average time of employment: 5+ years
Health care benefits: 50 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision, and prescriptions plan
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, day-care options, relocation assistance, telecommuting, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 30 days
Website: www.boozallen.com

That same response was seen after Hurricane Katrina when the company rebuilt the Ronald McDonald House and restored it with baby cribs, car seats, kitchen utensils and dishes, among other items.

But the firm also takes care of its own. Booz Allen's Make A Difference eCards allow a staff member to recognize a colleague's contributions. The awards range from a High5, which includes $100 for an employee who goes the extra mile in a short-term project or effort, to the Values in Practice Award, which recognizes employees who are role models for the firm's core values. These come with two roundtrip airline tickets to anywhere in the continental U.S., Mexico, Hawaii, Canada or a Caribbean or Bahamian cruise and two paid-days off with $1,000 in spending money.

The company provides up to $5,000 per year per employee for approved academic assistance, of which $2,500 can be used to obtain or maintain certification in a professional or technical field.

"If you are starting a new project and need some insight on how to work that project, they will most likely have a class in it," Franzer said. "And by taking that class you can feel good about going into something new and having some background before you do."•

— Garry Boulard

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Glenn Ryan, Randy Wilcox, Steve Lyons and Bubba Fullerton.

DCL Mooring and Rigging

Management at DCL Mooring and Rigging believes in rewarding employees for their commitment. Workers receive competitive pay, profit bonuses and a 100 percent 401(k) match up to 3 percent.

The company also celebrates birthdays, holidays and has special events such as picnics, crawfish boils and a catered lunch each month to acknowledge its safety record.

DCL fabricates all sizes of wire and synthetic rope slings for heavy lift applications. It provides onsite and offsite inspection and proof testing of wire rope, slings and hardware. The company has offices in New Orleans, Lafayette and Houma.

President Pete Kazunas said the company's four operating principles — safety, respect, quality and service — drive its actions and help build long-term partnerships with suppliers, customers and employees.

"DCL has a high-energy, positive work force and that's the cornerstone of why we're a great place to work," Kazunas said. "We all have different backgrounds, beliefs and lifestyles, but we all respect each other and that's where it starts. Our people want to be here, and I'm honored to be part of the employee's team."

Stacey Lucas started at DCL this summer. The vice president of operations oversees fabrication of rigging equipment, mooring, distribution of hardware, logistics, facilities, maintenance and safety at all three of the company's locations.

"I oversee the majority of hourly personnel in my role and when a company values people, growth and development, it's easier for me to manage people," she said. "The biggest reason I work here is because people are valued as much as I value people as a manager."

To help promote a positive attitude among workers, Lucas regularly seeks feedback on ways to improve job processes and safety. She also attends monthly safety meeting with employees. One month, she popped 30 bags of popcorn for employees to munch while they watched a safety video, and another time she brought in 75 burritos she made at home the night before.

"We do a lot of things to show our appreciation," she said. "It's fun and our people deserve it."

That appreciation also comes in the form of the company's profit bonuses based off of the company's profits for the previous quarter. Each employee receives half on their paycheck, and the other half is banked and distributed at the end of the year.

Glenn Ryan, a rigger and warehouse operator, sits on the safety committee that meets monthly. Employees write down potential safety issues and submit them to the committee for discussion.

"Safety is major here, and we have a much better safety program now than when I started three years ago," Ryan said. "We have consistent communication between the top of the company tree and the employees and everyone is cooperative. .... We also have training programs in place, class and certification for rigging inspections, forklift certification and driving classes. This is a hard business, but DCL makes it easier because we have an ample amount of people on every job and that makes it safer and better for each person."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Industrial
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 54
Average starting salary: $24,960 for hourly; $31,200 for salaried
Median salary: $39,520 for hourly; $45,760 for salaried
Average time of employment: 10-15 years
Health care benefits: 70 percent covered; dental and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, employee recognition program
Paid days off: 31 days
Website: www.dcl-usa.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Gerry Foor, Otis Wibon Jr., Chef Alfred Singleton, Jorge Henriquez and Phillip LeGrande at Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

Dickie Brennan and Co.

Sophie Martin, who joined Dickie Brennan & Co. in March, had been in the fine dining and wine industry in California for 11 years before moving to New Orleans.

Acknowledgement of employees is among the high qualities she lists about the restaurant group that includes Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse, Palace Café, Tableau and Bourbon House.

"They are truly grateful for you being a contributing part of the company and they let you know," said Martin, front of house manager at Palace Café. "That is so important."

Jamie Munoz, general manager of Bourbon House who has been with the company for six years, echoes that sentiment.

"They lend an extra hand when they didn't need to," Munoz said. "They care about people first. They take care of their employees and try to do the right thing."

One of those "extra hand moments" was in 2008 when Hurricane Gustav forced Bourbon House to close, but employees were still paid.

"We took an average of what they would have made that week and paid everyone in full," Munoz said. "We wanted to make sure that they were taken care of."

Programs that reward employees include a comment card contest. The employee who turns in the most comment cards on a monthly basis receives a $50 gift card, and some of the best comment cards are published in their company newsletter.

Otis Wilson Jr., an A-waiter at Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse for about 30 years, has won the comment card contest twice, but said the recognition was "a team effort."

Martin, Munoz and Wilson agree that management and the owners have an open-door policy.

"Nothing is too big or too small to approach management," Wilson said.

One of the best things about working with Dickie Brennan & Co. is that it promotes from within, Munoz said.

Nature of business: Dining
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 400
Average starting salary: $26,000 for hourly; $42,000 for management;
Median salary: $30,000 for hourly; $50,000 for management
Average time of employment: 5+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: Three months for management; six months for hourly
Other perks: Continuing education program, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals, reduced membership fee for fitness center
Paid days off: 5-20; additional 13 for corporate staff
Website: www.frenchquarter-dining.com

"Nothing builds morale more than the fact that they want you to move up and want you to succeed," Martin said.

In-house training and continuing education are offered continuously, while free wine education classes are offered four to five times a month for service staff.

The company also shares its profits with employees, having paid out $549,861 in 2011 and $488,900 in 2012 as of the end of July. Referral bonuses are also part of the equation, equaling $2,800 in 2011 and $3,500 in 2012 as of July.

Dickie Brennan also has a homeownership benefit program that reimburses employees, depending on tenure, up to $6,000 toward the cost of a home purchased in the metropolitan New Orleans area. That program paid out $19,680 paid in 2011.

Management also eats for free and employees eat for less than a $1 during family meals that are offered twice a day before shifts.

"Everyone works better when they are not hungry," Martin said, laughing.

Another perk that sets Dickie Brennan & Co. apart from other restaurants is that servers are eligible for health benefits after six months.

"I have never worked in a restaurant where servers are eligible for benefits," Martin said.•

— Jennifer Nall

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Larry Matthews, Jason Manson, Nathan Landry, Jermaine Dorsey, Johnny Yoder, Ian Burkhamer, Tremone Perry and Jeff Trauth.

SEVEN-TIME HONOREE

Durr Heavy Construction

Durr Heavy Construction hired Jason Manson for an entry-level position in 1994. Since then, he has had nine different roles on the estimating and project management sides of the business. His current title is chief operating officer, which puts him in charge of project management, field operations, equipment, labor and resources.

"It speaks volumes about this company that I'm still here," Mason said. "Durr provides opportunities for its people, and I'm the perfect example. We identify employee strengths, shore up weaknesses and make well-rounded team members that perform at high levels in multiple capacities."

Durr is a family-owned and operated construction company specializing in demolition, site preparation and underground utility installation.

Mason said he enjoys training the younger generation and helping them develop their career path. He trained all the new hires in 2007 when Durr opened its North Shore division.

"All the guys I trained for this division are still with us today and are major players in the market," he said. "We celebrate wins together with steak lunches on Fridays, and, on occasion, I cook breakfast for all the employees. It's important to celebrate and let people know they're appreciated. We have very little turnover and a wealth of opportunities for employees."

Patricia Champagne joined the company 15 years ago as an accountant. Now she's the controller, overseeing the accounting department's team of seven people. Her favorite company benefit is taking her dog, Lucy, to work once a month and handing out treats to the other employees' pets. She also bakes cakes for employee parties and has dinner once a month with field workers.

"It's a faith-based, family-oriented, happy work environment, and that's why people stay here," Champagne said. "We also have fun. We celebrate birthdays, throw baby and bridal showers, and have cooking events. We even celebrated when one of the women passed her notary exam. It doesn't matter what department you're in, it's a whole company celebrating together."

Executive assistant Kathlyn LeMeunier was hired in March and looks forward to the daily inspirational messages CEO Stephen Stumpf sends out. She also likes the free tickets to Saints and Hornets games, cash prizes given out during safety meetings and the onsite chapel. Durr holds a 15-minute prayer service on Fridays for employees who want to attend. The chapel is also open to employees throughout the week.

"Durr believes in change, but they don't change what they believe in, which is why they're successful," LeMeunier said. "They treat us with respect and care and we're not micromanaged. We're treated as adults, and it's a great feeling to work for a company like this."

Management makes sure to reward that hard work and has several recognition programs. The Employee of the Month receives $100 at the quarterly safety meeting, and the Safety Employees of the Month each receive $40. Quarterly Safety winners, or anyone who is accident free, is eligible to win a variety of prizes, including a share of $5,000 pot, while annual safety awards winners, or anyone who was accident free and attended at least 90 percent of weekly safety meetings, can claim a share of a $10,000 prize. Last year, 47 employees took home a piece of the reward. •

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: General contractor
Where based: Harahan
Employees: 135
Average starting salary: $32,700 for laborers; $60,500 for management
Median salary: $43,100 for laborers; $69,000 for management
Average time of employment: 12 years
Health care benefits: 75 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days for health care; 90 days for time off
Other perks: Continuing education program, day care options, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 17 days
Website: www.durrhc.com

FIVE-TIME HONOREE

Eagan Insurance Agency

Eagan Insurance has been a family-owned business for more than half a century, with four generations of Eagans serving at the helm of the firm and six members of the fifth generation rounding out its staff.

Since its founding in 1954, the company has expanded to three offices and bolstered its line of insurance products — all while racking up a reputation as a great place to work.

"When I first got here and they told me that after 90 days I'd get every other Friday off, I said, 'You're kidding me, right?' I just couldn't believe it," said Kim Kaufmann, an account executive who joined Eagan Insurance six months ago. "With everything that we're tasked to do … it's nice to have a regular flex Friday."

Being flexible is part of the Eagan way, said Sue Flanagan, who directs account services and has been with the agency for more than five years.

"One of things that stands out … is that people are genuinely sensitive to whatever issues may be occurring with staffers outside of work," Flanagan said. "That's something that really allows co-workers to get to know one another. People want to talk to you and get to know who you are."

Kaufmann said employees' knowledge of each other's lives has value during the workweek as well.

"Because people know each other, they know what they do at work," she said. "The benefit to that is that whenever someone needs help with something, you have four or five people asking how they can help."

Terry Lowe, who manages the company's marketing efforts, believes Eagan's interest in charitable activities and off-the-clock events for employees helps cement the agency's reputation as a great workplace.

"I was approached by the firm to join them when I was working for a competitor," Lowe said. "It was a very hard decision because I was happy where I was and was doing well in my career, but … no one is looking over anyone's shoulder, in part, because no one is interested in taking anyone else's job. … It was the best decision I made."

"The personal style of management is really a benefit because if you have a question, you'll get an answer and you don't have to wait overnight to get it," said Lowe, a six-year employee. "On top of that, all of the things that we're encouraged to be involved in is great. We have all sorts of team-building activities, like our office cookbook, denim Thursdays, bowling tournament and crawfish boil."

Some of the annual events include a Christmas dinner at the Southern Yacht Club and a crawfish boil for employees and their families at Bay-Waveland Yacht Club in Bay St. Louis, Miss., with a live band and sailboat rides.

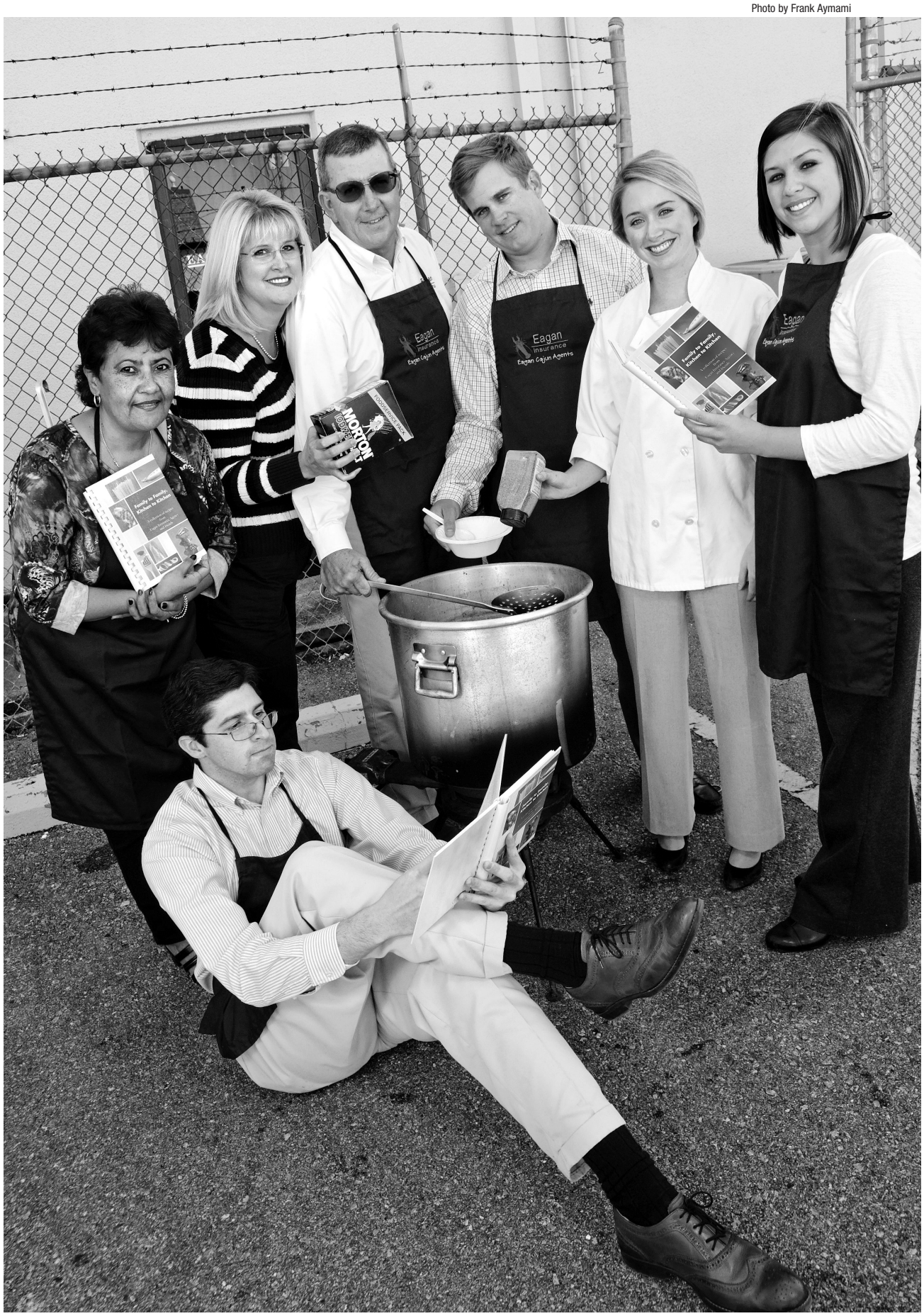
The Eagan MVP award, which is voted on by the employees, comes with a Waterford crystal bowl and the winner's photo displayed in the reception area all year. New hires are welcomed with a fresh pineapple, while producers and managers are given special Cross pens and chocolate chip cookies for good work.

Eagan also invests in its employees' wellbeing by keeping a Wii in the training room for exercise during lunch and after hours. The company also has a quarterly Biggest Loser Program and offers on-site Zumba classes and a boot camp exercise program that former New Orleans Saints player Buford Jordan sponsors.•

— Mason Harrison

Nature of business: Insurance
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 76
Average starting salary: $45,000 for staff; $145,000 for producers
Median salary: $49,000 for staff; $175,000 for producers
Average time of employment: 9 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 53-60 days
Website: www.eaganins.com

Photo by Frank Aymami



Clockwise: John Hadden (seated) Iris Gonzalez, Sandra Zeringue, Wayne Roussel, Andrew Eagan, Mallory Eagan and Maeghan Monnerjahn.

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Pedro Zabala, Michelle Whitehead, Julie Avena, Richard Vallas and Dionne Coston.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

Fair Grounds Race Course and Slots

Payday and hurricanes don't mix.

As Hurricane Isaac approached in August, Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots employees were getting ready to seek shelter or evacuate as their paychecks were due. There was no telling when mail delivery would resume, and many employees didn't have direct deposit into a checking account.

That's when management intern Anthony Morgan decided to get creative. He set employees up with reloadable prepaid cards, on which the payroll office could load the balance of employees' paychecks.

"We had to make sure everyone in the company got paid," Morgan said.

Making sure employees know they have each other's backs is a big part of what drives employee confidence at the Fair Grounds, said Morgan, who is in his third year with the company as a middle manager in the human resources department.

Despite the Fair Grounds being a part of publicly traded Churchill Downs Inc. of Louisville, Ky., everyone in the company is approachable, from the president to the entry-level worker, Morgan said.

"It's a major corporation, and it still manages to stay down to earth," Morgan said.

With operations including the New Orleans racetrack and slots facility plus 11 off-track betting facilities throughout south Louisiana, maintaining an engaged work force is a priority for Tim Bryant, Fair Grounds president. The company holds employee events throughout the year such as its Ambassador Roundtable program, in which employees from different departments are treated to lunch and given a chance to discuss what the organization is doing well and where it can improve.

"We're not perfect. No one is perfect," Bryant said. "But we've created a culture of listening to employee concerns."

Nature of business: Horse racing and casino
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 425 year-round; additional 275-380 during racing season
Average starting salary: $11 an hour
Median salary: $16 an hour
Average time of employment: 4 years
Health care benefits: 70 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, day-care options, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 24-34 days
Website: www.fairgroundsracecourse.com

Working amid horse races and betting creates a fun work environment, but professionalism is still a virtue, employees say. At a time when many companies are choosing to cut back, the Fair Grounds still matches 100 percent of employees' contributions to their 401(k) up to 3 percent, and employees are vested immediately. They can also receive full health coverage starting at $11.74 a month.

The Fair Grounds also names employees of the month and quarter, and chooses two employees of the year from that pool to receive $2,500 each. The company covers the tax tied to the awards.

Being named Employee of the Year was a coup for Sunshine Nail, a mutual teller at the Fair Grounds' Off Track Betting Facility in Covington. Nail, who has been with the facility for 12 years, likes her job so much that she never misses work and is consistently on time.

Nail said she also is happy to work double shifts because it means she only has to work three days a week. The flexibility has come in handy over the years, when Nail has juggled part-time jobs and school with her work at the Fair Grounds.

"I love that about this job," she said. "The scheduling is good for things you need to do."•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Photo by Frank Aymami

From rear of bus: Michelle Rose, Henry Contreras, Amy Ruiz, Ronald Hayward, Cindy Meier, Tamica Smith, Janssen Taylor and Diana Peters.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

1st Lake Properties

Although she has only been employed with 1st Lake Properties less than a year, Michelle Ponceti considers it the job she had been searching for all of her life.

"I was recruited by a person inside the company who knew I would enjoy the opportunity," said Ponceti, assistant manager at 1st Lake's Windmill Creek North Property in Metairie. "It's the perfect mix of customer service and sales, which I love. I feel like I am accomplishing something by helping people find the right place to live."

Ponceti describes 1st Lake as "a large company with a small size feel" and says upper management has great respect for those employees on the front lines.

"The people on the high end know what we are dealing with because they have been there themselves," she said. "They understand what we do on a daily basis, and they do not hesitate to offer help when needed."

Toni Barattini, director of operations, said much of the help Ponceti refers to comes in the form of extensive on-site training at 1st Lake's state-of-the-art classroom facility at the firm's home office in Metairie.

"Any topic that employees are confused about they can get more information on it at the training room," Barattini said. "We always have some new technology rolling out that our IT department has to break down for employees. It is a real value to everyone."

Ed Domingue, general maintenance man for 1st Lake's Sugar Mill East property in Kenner, said the company's employee training is well known throughout the region.

"We have had other companies come in to see what we are doing as far as training," Domingue said. "We do classes on making units ready, on retaining residents and much more."

Nature of business: Property management
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 330
Average starting salary: $13 per hour; $37,000 for salaried
Median salary: $13 per hour; $40,865 for salaried
Average time of employment: 12 years
Health care benefits: 75 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education and employee recognition programs, on-site gym
Paid days off: 24
Website: www.1stlake.com

1st Lake also does its fair share of celebrating.

Barattini said management organizes a banquet every quarter to present awards for every facet of employment.

"It is a chance for us to celebrate each other and all of our accomplishments," he said. "We do giveaways, bonuses and other special acknowledgements of service. At our most recent banquet, we celebrated a 20th anniversary and a 30th anniversary of employment, which is a big deal when you consider that 1st Lake has only been around 40 years."

Ponceti added that management also stepped up for employees affected by Hurricane Isaac in September.

"Some were offered the opportunity to take up residence in some of our model apartments," Ponceti said. "We also held a huge fundraiser where we collected food, clothing and other supplies for employees who were affected. Our management reacts to things that happen in our world."•

— Robin Shannon

EIGHT-TIME HONOREE

Geocent

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Paul Oerret shows off his "flying chicken" to Stephen Mann, left, and David Olivier.

Catherine Murray is quick to admit there are many things she values about working at Geocent, but what she likes the most is access to the growing company's leadership.

"It really is an open-door policy here — and at all levels of management," said Murray, a contracts manager for the IT services, engineering and consulting company.

"It doesn't matter what the issue is or the project, you can talk things through and get help, if you need it, from anyone," said Murray, who has been with Geocent since 2009.

As Geocent's staff has roughly doubled over the past three years, President and Chief Operating Officer Rick Gremillion is determined to do whatever he can to maintain the company's open-door tradition.

"This is something we talk about every day," Gremillion said. "It is obviously easier to keep this kind of thing going when you're a smaller company."

But because Geocent has thrived in what Gremillion describes as an "integrated team environment," the company has launched Stay Interviews, which are designed to spark candid and frank staff input on any number of company matters.

"Like many companies, we have always done exit interviews when someone is leaving," Gremillion said. "But the stay interview is really a discussion with anyone who works here, talking about what makes them stay, and — just as important — what would make them leave."

Desiree Brubaker says Geocent's culture of open communications is not only vertical but horizontal.

"Basically, you can talk to anyone who works here, including the people at our satellite offices," said Brubaker, who came to Geocent as an accounts payable clerk last summer. "I've worked for large corporations before, but I have never had this kind of experience."

With an average starting salary of just more than $79,000 and a median salary of $83,852, Geocent also offers a variety of paid employee training and continuing education programs. Summer brownbag webinars are also part of the culture.

Such benefits and perks underline the value Geocent places in its employees.

"Any one of our employees could go right now and get a job making more money," Gremillion said. "It's not because we underpay, but because that is just how the market in our industry is right now. So you naturally have to have competitive pay and benefits but also try to do more than that."

That's why management has expanded the recognition given to employees from monetary rewards to include trips, such as cruises and Las Vegas getaways.

Geocent, which has always offered same-sex partner benefits, has grown so much that it can now offer full medical, dental and vision benefits to all employee partners. The company has also increased its 401(k) match from 50 percent of an employee's 6 percent contribution to 8 percent.•

— Garry Boulard

Nature of business: Information technology services
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 201
Average starting salary: $79,134
Median salary: $83,852
Average time of employment: 3 years
Health care benefits: 77 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision, and prescriptions plan
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 25 days
Website: www.geocent.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Rebecca Mai, Roxanne Fassbender, Lamar Washington, Randall Scnadelback, Jennifer White, David Tysinger, Rainey Tarpy, Fernandos Magee and Curtis Thomas learn how to run a craps table from Instructor Dawn Terre, throwing dice.

EIGHT-TIME HONOREE

Harrah's New Orleans

Harrah's New Orleans has career opportunities for just about everybody, whether you're a mechanic, engineer, finance guru, marketing expert, attorney or a food and beverage server, said Brad Weissman, director of hotel operations.

"This is a great place to work, and you're not going to find too many businesses with this type of versatility," he said. "Harrah's is a company of opportunities and growth. It's also one of the few companies that practices what it preaches. From the CEO down, we live by the business model 'Happy employees equal happy customers,' which equals growth and profits."

Harrah's New Orleans has more than 1,600 employees. The company offers competitive pay, free parking, discounted meals and dry cleaning. They also have a lactation room for mothers.

"Harrah's also has an employee recognition program that is unparalleled," Weissman said. "When teams go above and beyond, they earn total return credits that can be used to buy items like a grill, car or iPad. Many companies want teams to be happy, but they don't make the decision to support it. Harrah's does."

Employees also earn reward points for service. Last year, the company had a stellar year and saw a 9 percent improvement in service hours over the year before.

"A 2 percent improvement in a year is normal and 4 percent is fabulous, so at 9 percent we awarded every employee 10,000 total return points, which was enough to buy an iPad," assistant general manager Sherri Pucci Sosa said. "Now we have a lot of employees walking around the property with Apple products. It's really a great way to reward people for outstanding work."

Kristina Zippert became compliance manager nearly six years ago. She makes sure the casino follows all state and federal rules and regulations and acts as the liaison between the casino and Louisiana State Police, which oversees the gambling industry. Her favorite perks are free parking and the game room where employees can play video games.

She also likes it when the company rents out the Aquarium of the Americas or Louisiana Children's Museum, so families can enjoy a day together.

Zippert attributes Harrah's success to the friendly supportive staff. She also believes upper management truly cares about employees and goes to great lengths to make sure they are happy and healthy.

Harrah's recently offered health education seminars for employees so they could learn about diet and exercise and get tips on weight loss and smoking cessation.

"Companies are successful when they care about their employees and make sure they're happy and healthy," Zippert said. "We live to serve our guests so the company takes care of us and makes sure we have everything we need. This is a fun place to work, and we actually have a fun committee, which is a group of employees that come up with fun things for us to do. If you're a person that likes to have fun, then this is the place for you."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Casino/hotel
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 1,603 locally; about 70,000 companywide
Average starting salary: $9.19 per hour; $58,614 for salaried
Median salary: $10 per hour; $50,799 for salaried
Average time of employment: 5.7 years
Health care benefits: 70 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, day care options, relocation assistance, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 23 days
Website: www.caesars.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Clockwise from bottom left: Clevetta Marshall, India Love, Mai Pham, Aseion Burns, Karen Lowman, Tara Jackson, Fernando Cardriche, Artemio Castillo and Keiana Daniels.

SEVEN-TIME HONOREE

Hilton New Orleans

Megan Oliver beams with pride when she talks about her job at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. The 23-year-old guest services agent joined the company seven months ago after graduating from the University of New Orleans with a degree in hotel, restaurant and tourism administration.

"Hilton is known for providing excellent service, so I'm proud to tell people I work here," Oliver said. "I also told them I want to progress to management, so they're working with me to move up because they want me to stay satisfied in my career. If I can't do something, I ask a manager. They stand behind us and support us to do the best we can."

Hilton Riverside has 650 team members, and more than 40 percent have been with the hotel for more than 10 years. General Manager Fred Sawyer joined the company nine years ago and has worked in the hotel industry 27 years.

"People get hooked in this industry and stay at the Hilton because we offer people opportunities and careers, not just a job," he said, adding that the perfect example is team member Felicia Wano, who started in laundry 33 years ago and worked her way into an executive position. Today, she is director of revenue management.

"The Hilton is a great place to work," Sawyer said. "Our team members talk to each other and share a sense of pride and camaraderie, and we offer good benefits."

Some of the benefits include free meals for employees when they're on the clock, an annual holiday party, an on-site gym, flexible hours and free e-learning courses for effective communications, leadership skills, email etiquette and computer programs such as Microsoft Office. They also celebrate birthdays and victories together, and employees receive discounted rates at more than 3,600 Hilton hotels worldwide.

Beverage Manager Logan Weatherly said he still likes his job after three years because the Hilton provides a stable and supportive environment with opportunities for advancement. He also likes that team members are rewarded for a job well done.

"We have a group of managers called the Pride Patrol that acknowledge an employee of the month for the front and the back of the house," Weatherly said. "They surprise the person with balloons and a coupon for a couple hundred dollars and take their picture for other employees to see. ... They (employees) drive everything."

That's why Hilton makes sure to reward them for hard work.

The employee of the month program, called Spirit of Pride, comes with a $200 cash prize plus other gifts, while the Manager/Supervisor of the Quarter winner, called Leadership & Commitment, receives $350.

There's also the Summer Recognition program where employees compete for positive guest comment cards to win a prize at the end of summer. The 2012 reward was a three-night trip to Hilton Chicago with airfare for two people.

All employees receive free parking, a $20 Rouses gift card at Thanksgiving and a $50 Walmart gift card every Christmas. Other perks include two tickets to a Hornets game each year, and the Lolli Trolly, where managers surprise employees by pushing around a candy and snack cart as an appreciation for busy times.•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Hotel
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 750 locally; about 130,000 companywide
Average starting salary: $11.55 per hour; $36,750 for salaried
Median salary: $15.60 per hour; $47,250 for salaried
Average time of employment: 10 years
Health care benefits: 90 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits, dental, vision, and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 32
Website: www.neworleans-hilton.com

THREE-TIME HONOREE

HRI Properties

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Roger Freibert, Michael Albracht, Adriana O'Brien and Jim B. Cloutman.

The threat of severe tropical weather is an annual fact of life in southeast Louisiana, making it a good idea to have an evacuation plan or a friend with a spare room or two where you can ride out an approaching storm.

HRI Properties turned into that friend for its employees this summer, sheltering staff members during Hurricane Isaac.

The company manages hotels and residential properties in five states, including the former Hibernia Bank tower in downtown New Orleans, which is being redeveloped into apartments.

"We're a firm that values excellent design," said Gary Meadows, who has led the company's design unit since 1995. "I enjoy working here because what we've accomplished is rare in property management. Our architects, construction teams and property managers all work for the same firm. We can truly see a project through from design to implementation."

Meadows said the approach has benefits beyond the obvious.

"Because we all work in-house, someone from one team can walk over and meet with someone from another area who's working on the same project if that person has a question," he said. "We're able to maintain a low turnover rate because folks are satisfied with their work and participate in the various stages of the process. Our division alone has grown from about one or two employees when we first started to more than 16 people — and that's not by accident."

The company's overall growth, which includes 72 new jobs since last summer, has come as HRI expands the number of properties it manages. It came in handy this summer when the company announced it would house employees who needed a secure location to ride out the storm.

"I believe management did that because it's just part of who they are and what they do," said Judith Symthe, who joined HRI in March and manages the front desk at the Hyatt Place hotel. "People here always look out for each other and while the gesture was extremely nice, it didn't surprise me," she said. "Your co-workers will get you whatever you need and even encourage you to apply for other job openings that are available in the company because HRI believes in hiring from within."

The company also offers up to $10,000 for tuition assistance for a graduate degree; a Perks Pass, which gives employees 25 percent off at all HRI-managed hotels and restaurants; and a birthday holiday for all employees, effective this year.

In the past year at its headquarters, HRI opened an on-site gym and an employee relaxation room, which has big-screen TVs, computer and iPod stations, recliners, an employee information wall and a foosball table.

Debra Taullie, an operations manager with the company for five years, said one of the best parts about working for HRI is the variety of its properties.

"No two properties are alike," she said. "We recently renovated the old Blue Plate mayonnaise factory and kept one of the large vats in order to display it. Our design team is always going into buildings and searching for ways to preserve their history."•

— Mason Harrison

Nature of business: Real estate development and management
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 306
Average starting salary: $26,874 per hour; $52,450 for salaried
Median salary: $28,257 per hour; $72,910 for salaried
Average time of employment: 6.7 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 or 90 days after hire
Other perks: Relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 32
Website: www.hriproperties.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Antonella Maratuech, Donnie Daniel, Carol Interiano, Chris Smith, Nicole Carr, Alexis Adams, Tara Schanks and Ryan Waguespack.

Hyatt Regency New Orleans

Having a job at the Hyatt Regency New Orleans is sort of like being on the Showcase Showdown on "The Price is Right." Employees get a 12-night hotel stay anywhere in the world, all-expenses-paid vacations for employees of the year and a chance to grab dollar bills in the hotel's money machine booth.

"At other hotel chains, you get a discount on rooms," said Matt Whipple, a Hyatt business travel salesman. "My girlfriend and I took a trip to Dallas, and we were able to use comp nights to stay at the Hyatt there completely free."

After one year of employment, all Hyatt employees — regardless of rank — receive 12 free nights at any of the chain's hotels worldwide.

Many New Orleans-based employees will be able to cash in those hotel stays soon, as the Hyatt Regency just celebrated its one-year anniversary in October when it reopened after repairs related to Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures.

"To see the hotel come from absolutely nothing to this huge, bustling building full of people has been quite a journey," Whipple said.

Appreciating diversity and creating opportunities for its employees, particularly women and minorities, is one of the Hyatt's strengths, general manager Michael Smith said. He has been with the hotel for almost 35 years, starting out as a busboy and working his way up.

"Hyatt has afforded me the opportunity to make a great living and travel all over the U.S. and the world," Smith said. "They've been very good to me, and I've been good to Hyatt."

Employees say internal communication is a priority for the Hyatt Regency, and it's almost impossible to miss. Management saturates the hotel daily with information via closed-circuit televisions in the cafeteria and employee locker rooms. The hotel also holds quarterly business meetings, where employees of the month and quarter are named. At those meetings, employees can win a chance to step inside a 1970s game-show style money machine.

"I think those quarterly meetings impact (morale) a lot," Whipple says. "One of the most important things for employee morale is just awareness."

Night production cook Willie Strickland became the hotel's first employee of the month in January. Employees know her as a constantly smiling, upbeat presence at the hotel, where the kitchen staff has nicknamed her "Mama Willie." When Strickland's son passed away in April, members of many departments supported her when she returned to work.

"If it hadn't been for Hyatt, I wouldn't have made it," Strickland said. "That really motivated me to stick with this company."

Strickland has been a cook for 25 years at other local dining establishments but says her experience at the Hyatt has stood out. She has been promoted three times since joining the hotel, including twice during her first month.•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Nature of business: Hotel/hospitality
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 433 locally; about 130,000 companywide
Average starting salary: $25,147 for hourly, $62,511 for salaried
Median salary: $24,960 for hourly, $54,800 for salaried
Average time of employment: 1.5 years
Health care benefits: 75 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 23 days; additional 5 days per year of employment
Website: www.neworleans.hyatt.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Seated from left: Christine Saucier with Nelson, Kenneth Purcell with Cash, Alice Dixon with Lucy and Corey Seifert with Thibodeaux. Standing: Matthew Stolley, Ian Thibodeaux, Farah Williams, Dominique Saulet and Alex Hemard.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

iSeatz

Kenneth Purcell believes people should not only enjoy their work, but their work environment. So he designed the iSeatz office to be a dynamic, dog-friendly workplace with an open floor plan, high ceilings and large windows to let in natural light.

The software development firm also has a 600-square-foot hangout room outfitted with couches, a big-screen television and Xbox video game console, plus complimentary snacks and soft drinks. T-shirts and flip-flops are acceptable business attire.

Purcell, who is CEO, takes his three English bulldogs to work every day, and he said they often roll around during staff meetings to get attention.

"We work long hours and carry a lot of weight on our shoulders, so we need to have some fun," he said.

The company has 68 employees, nearly double the number it had 18 months ago thanks to an onslaught of new business. The average age of the iSeatz work force is mid-30s, and while a college degree is preferred, it's not required.

"Diversity makes us tick," Purcell said. "We have an ultra-high-quality product, and our team is incredibly motivated to get the job done. We operate with precision and passion for success."

Ann Rucker moved to New Orleans from Austin, Texas, three months ago to work for iSeatz. The business analyst is responsible for finding ways to improve user experience for client websites.

"My job is challenging and fast-paced and I love it," Rucker said. "I also feel like my work is valued. I have never been thanked so much — ever. And everyone laughs while they're working, which is music to my ears."

Rucker also enjoys taking her dog to work and being close enough to walk downtown during lunch.

Colin Gagon, director of development, said he's jazzed to be working for a small company where he is challenged and learns from his peers. He also likes the floor plan, open lines of communication between co-workers and the opportunity to work with talented people. His favorite benefits are company-paid parking and having access to the latest technology.

"Working with smart people and learning something new every day is good for my long-term career," said Gagon, who joined the company in 2010. "I also like working with innovative technology, which is not an option in many jobs. I find it valuable and exciting, especially because technology changes quickly and you can fall behind."

New employees are made to feel welcome before they even enter the office. Each department's manager sends an email to their team with a biography for the new hire. The bios include information such as favorite hobbies and fun anecdotes that endear new teams member to their colleagues.

When the new employee arrives, they participate in an orientation program that walks them through the various aspects of being an iSeatz team member. They are issued a new Apple computer and personal work space, introduced to their colleagues and briefed on company policies and procedures.

Orientation often ends with a celebratory team gathering at Capdeville, the restaurant and bar located in the building.•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Software development
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 68
Average starting salary: $63,124
Median salary: $74,073
Average time of employment: 1.25 years
Health care benefits: 95 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, employee recognition program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 32 days
Website: www.iseatz.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Andra Martin, Mary Coghlan, Maureen Tydlaska, Sue Neyrey and Laura Mullen.

Kean Miller

Employees at Kean Miller say there is a camaraderie among employees that is unmatched when compared with other law firms.

"I have been in buildings with other firms, and it just seems like we are more prone to talk to each other where others do not," human resources director Mary Coghlan said. "Everyone is on equal footing and it shows in the way the partners treat the employees."

Coghlan said the lead attorneys go out of their way to make sure all employees maintain the same benefits and continue to receive annual raises regardless of outside factors.

"They are much more likely to take a cut before we have to," she said. "I'm sure there are situations where companies have had to cut back recently, but you don't see that here. They are committed to keeping things the same. They make my job so much easier because I can stay competitive in hiring the best people for the work."

And the firm is growing.

"We are expanding to two floors in the building to accommodate the amount of growth we have had in recent years," Coghlan said. "When we started, we only had six or seven attorneys on staff and now we have 29. The management is also talking to each employee to determine what has worked in the past and what needs to be changed in the new offices so things run efficiently."

With the firm's New Orleans offices situated in the heart of the Central Business District at 909 Poydras St., one of the most popular benefits among employees is free parking.

"It is a very big deal," said legal secretary Kim Kavannaugh, who started with Kean Miller in June. "It's like an extra part of our salary. Lots of other firms I have worked for do not do that. I think it makes us feel safer."

For those who don't drive, Kean Miller reimburses them for public transportation. The firm also pays for continuing education for paralegals and attorneys and allows staff members to select their preferred work schedule with a start time between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Coghlan also said the firm is committed to closing at 3 p.m. when the Saints play at home during the week so employees can either head to the Superdome or beat the traffic.

"Being on Poydras Street, we are right in the middle of it," Coghlan said. "We know the staff is excited about home games, whether they are going to them or watching them at home."

Kean Miller also makes sure to celebrate its employees' accomplishments, as seen through baby showers for all expecting parents and anniversary gifts every five years.

"It is always a very nice watch or some jewelry from one of the local jewelers," office assistant Andra Martin said. "After 30 years, I received a very nice ring. The gift is so much better than say a plaque or a pin that you never wear. It shows that the employees are cared for and respected for the work they do, and that means a lot."•

— Robin Shannon

Nature of business: Law firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 48 locally; 268 firmwide
Average starting salary: $44,850 for staff; $95,000 for attorneys
Median salary: $47,325 for staff; $104,143 for attorneys
Average time of employment: 6 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program
Paid days off: 47 days
Website: www.keanmiller.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Dani Lisotta, Brigette Smith, Hamish Moudgil, Virginia Giacontiere, Andy Lowell and Sherry Farry pose in their Halloween costumes.

FOUR-TIME HONOREE

LAMMICO

Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Co. provides liability coverage for medical professionals. It rewards its 115 employees for their commitment to the company through competitive financial rewards, flexible work schedules, professional development and a host of benefits that include tuition assistance, free covered parking and up to $350 annual reimbursement for a gym membership or weight loss program.

The company also picks up the tab for continuing education.

"Employees are our most important asset," said Divisional Vice President Karen Nugent, who has been with the company 29 years. "We recognize that a happy, fulfilled employee who feels valued is productive, so we work hard to achieve that. We hire qualified people, encourage them and provide training for continued development. We also seek ideas from all levels of workers because we're committed to improvement and innovation."

Sandy Runco, an accounting assistant who has been with the company 24 years, said LAMMICO is a well-run company with little turnover.

"We have a phenomenal group here," she said. "The management team is kind and empathetic and cares about employees. We have one employee going through chemotherapy, and we all pick up the slack for that person. This is a people place. We have a clear definition of what needs to be done and we do it."

Runco said employees also have the option to work remotely or come in early and leave early if necessary, which she said she did when she picked up her children after school.

That flexibility also includes closing every Friday at 1 p.m. and allowing all employees to wear jeans every day.

LAMMICO organizes special events throughout the year to show appreciation for its employees. Some of the favorites are the tailgating parties during football season, an annual seafood feast for employees and their families, and holiday parties.

"Halloween is big here," Runco said. "We decorate the office and have a costume contest, which is a lot of fun. We also have a costume competition for Mardi Gras, and each department decorates. Everybody participates because we all enjoy doing these things together."

Nature of business: Insurance
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 115
Average starting salary: $66,080
Median salary: $65,184
Average time of employment: 11 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 31.5
Website: www.lammico.com

Jacqueline Bodet, corporate communications and website specialist, said she is still amazed at the warm reception she received from co-workers 11 months ago when she started with the company.

"I got engaged to my fiancé shortly after I started here, and even though these people didn't know me, they embraced me and included me and my fiancé in fun activities," Bodet said. "They also threw a wedding shower in my honor. I thought I was going to a working lunch with my boss, and when I stepped into the room everyone was seated and waiting for me. … The people I work with are very giving. It's a happy atmosphere and I'm proud to work here."

LAMMICO doesn't just treat their newcomers with that kind of fanfare. This year the company recognized 28 employees who have been with the company ranging from five to 30 years with service awards. Recipients could choose from designer watches and handbags, jewelry, home appliances and electronics including televisions, laptops, cameras, Kindles and Xbox systems. The 30-year recipient received a desktop computer with a technical support contract, a printer and an iPad.•

— Kerry Duff

Photo by Frank Aymami

LaPorte employees show their support for Movember, an event in November when men grow mustaches to raise awareness for prostate and testicular cancer.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

LaPorte CPAs and Business Advisors

In negotiating her return to LaPorte CPAs and Business Advisors after a four-year absence, Jennifer Bernard-Allen said with a laugh, "I gave myself no bargaining power. They knew I wanted to come back."

The only reason Bernard-Allen left in the first place was because her husband owed the Navy four years in return for his medical school scholarship. But the whole time they were in South Carolina, Bernard-Allen kept the lines of communication open.

"This is a very unique place to work," said Bernard-Allen, a senior manager who rejoined LaPorte in the fall of 2010. "We are a growing business, but there is still the personal touch that you typically find with a smaller company, particularly in relation to how the coaches and mentors and firm leadership interacts with you."

That personal touch extends to scheduling.

Carrie Dunbar, a health care consultant who signed on with LaPorte in late 2011, said she spoke with several people she knew at LaPorte who told her they had a great work/life balance.

"They told me how flexible LaPorte was when it came to scheduling and job-sharing," Dunbar said. "And that turned out to be exactly the case. … If you need to work at home for one day or for a few hours, no one questions that."

CEO Ted Mason says the firm's work/life balance is critical to its success.

"Our industry as a whole has not particularly emphasized that balance because of the compression of workloads and different filing deadlines that we have to work with on a regular basis," Mason said. "But we take the opposite approach. We want to make sure our people here are happy."

In that quest, LaPorte has a system of coaches who regularly meet with employees to discuss their goals.

"There is a very clear path to achieving the success that you want to achieve," Bernard-Allen said, "and part of that comes from the coaching system. I meet once a month with my coach, and we always have a different topic that we discuss. And it's not where does he want me to go; it's how he can help me get to where I want to go."

Mason said the firm works with employees from the time they start to structure a plan that works in helping them achieve their goals.

"This is the culture of our firm and something we are never going to change," he said.

But it's also a culture of fun, with annual Christmas and After Busy Season parties, popcorn afternoons, a crazy hat day and a Thanksgiving potluck. LaPorte also provides year-end bonuses that average $2,000, a $3,000 bonus for passing the CPA exam and a recruiting bonus of up to $6,500.

The firm's Houston office has employees representing more than 10 countries. To share the various cultures, the employees organized an international luncheon to showcase their cooking talent. The Louisiana offices have since picked up the idea, and awards are given out in several different categories.

This year LaPorte hosted a family day at Middendorf's filled with activities for children such as face painting and goodie bags.•

— Garry Boulard

Nature of business: Accounting
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 156
Average starting salary: $35,900 for staff; $50,000 for accountants
Median salary: $38,890 for staff; $69,800 for accountants
Average time of employment: 6 years
Health care benefits: 90 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 34-58 days
Website: www.laporte.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Dana Goblowsky, left, and Santra Buzzetta.

FIVE-TIME HONOREE

North Oaks Health System

Shantel Johnson, a market strategist and business development representative for North Oaks Health System in Hammond, said she felt the hospital was a special place from the moment she submitted her application.

"I was impressed by the way the company really takes the time to get a feel for the temperament of each applicant and understand how that person might react in different situations," said Johnson, who joined North Oaks earlier this year. "We were assessed on how well we worked in a team and given a personality assessment and even given a skills exercise specific to my field."

Shelly Welch, senior vice president of patient services and the hospital's director of nursing, points to the organization's "investment in professional growth" as a feature that attracted her to the hospital a year ago.

"We frequently have the opportunity to hear from national speakers in a variety of fields, and that type of education is important for the growth of the staff and provides us with new and updated information," Welch said.

North Oaks also awards a $5,000 scholarship every year to a full- or part-time employee pursuing a health care career.

A high-tech working environment and multiple opportunities for professional development are just some of the ingredients employees say make North Oaks a place where health care providers want to work as their field continues to grow in southeast Louisiana.

"We're really on the cutting edge of medical care, and that's what makes working here so exciting," said Suzanne Smith, a mammography supervisor who joined North Oaks in 1994. "There's also a lot of attention to detail and attention to clients' needs. We have an all-female staff to carry out mammography for women and have implemented robotic care to achieve minimally invasive surgeries whenever possible."

One of the more touted benefits of working at North Oaks is its on-site childcare and early education center. Open to children ages 6 weeks to 13 years, Children's Choice is available to North Oaks employees, volunteers, active medical staff physicians and their office staff, students/interns with current approved school affiliation, as well as grandchildren of employees and volunteers.

Employees can earn one day off with pay for every fifth three-hour shift volunteered at North Oaks and community-sponsored events. In addition, volunteers earn a chance for a four-day, three-night trip for two anywhere in the continental U.S. The employee who volunteers the most hours each year is awarded with a reserved parking space for one year.

North Oaks also presents awards for five-year increments of service at an annual reception and program in February. Honorees receive a "celebration kit," which includes a certificate of recognition, an appreciation card and either a five-year oak leaf pin or a catalog with which to pick a gift for those who have reached the 10-year or higher milestone for service.

And when employees who have worked at North Oaks for 20 or more years and leaders who have worked for 10 or more years retire, they are eligible to receive $100 for every year.•

— Mason Harrison

Nature of business: Health care
Where based: Hammond
Employees: 2,482
Average starting salary: $57,179
Median salary: $48,984
Average time of employment: 7.2 years
Health care benefits: 72 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education programs, day-care options, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 46 days
Website: www.northoaks.org

Photo by Frank Aymami

The Ignite Committee hands out treats in the Women's Services Department during Employee Appreciation Week at Ochsner Medical Center.

EIGHT-TIME HONOREE

Ochsner Health System

It may be an organization of more than 10,000 employees, but those who work for Ochsner Health System say you would never know it.

"I'm surprised that as big as we are, we still have a very personal touch," said Terry Bourgeois, director of cardiopulmonary care at Ochsner St. Ann General Hospital in Raceland.

Despite being south Louisiana's largest system of hospitals and health care facilities, Ochsner has managed to maintain a sense of community where employees from all ranks say they can interact freely with executives.

"When you have your CEO walking down the hallway and saying hello to you, it's not just one of those empty hellos," said Tyler Lott, program manager for undergraduate medical education. "He knows who you are and what you do,"

Terry Bourgeois was born and raised near Bayou Lafourche and has worked for St. Ann General for 33 years. Being a part of a rural, community hospital was all he ever knew. So when Ochsner acquired the hospital six years ago, employees braced for change. Ochsner's executives conducted town hall meetings to put the community at ease about what was taking place, and the entire process was very transparent, Bourgeois said.

"People refer to St. Ann's as 'our hospital,' and being part of the major system has not changed that," he said.

Employees point to transparency for keeping morale strong at Ochsner. The health system maintains various lines of communication, including emails, conference calls and town hall meetings. The company is careful to consider that some employees, such as nurses who are checking on patients all day, can't always get to a computer to check emails, Lott said.

"They utilize every kind of communication they have available to make sure the team is aware of what's going on," she said.

Joette Karr, downtown facility manager for Elmwood Fitness Center, a division of Ochsner, said she appreciates being able to communicate freely with upper management.

"I have no problem going to my general manager and chatting with him, and I think that's really important to have that comfort level with upper management," Karr said. "They're very approachable."

Karr said she also likes that Ochsner works to promote employees from within. She started out as a front desk employee with Elmwood two years ago and was promoted to her current post in May.

In 2011, more than 1,300 Ochsner employees were promoted or transferred. Among its leadership team, 62 percent of promotions were internal candidates, according to the hospital.

Ochsner employees also receive discounts on cell phone services, computers, massages, Sam's Club memberships and tickets to Saints, Hornets and Zephyrs games. Ochsner operates an employee wellness program, in which nearly 90 percent of the work force participates. There also is free access to health screenings, a smoking cessation program and immunizations.•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Nature of business: Health care
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 10,876
Average starting salary: $49,341
Median salary: $45,760
Average time of employment: 7.64 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, on-site gym, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 26 - 36 days
Website: www.ochsner.org

SIX-TIME HONOREE

Peter A. Mayer Advertising

Having fun is baked into the guiding principles at Peter A. Mayer Advertising. In fact, the company surveys employees annually to see how they rate everything from facilities to business tools, and then they develop a game plan for a better employee experience.

"Having fun is an important cultural element," President Mark Mayer said. "Of course we work very hard for our clients, but we believe everyone needs a little fun in their life and professional work day."

Although a select group at the advertising agency is responsible for planning major events such as the annual Christmas party and crawfish boil, Mark and business partner Josh Mayer organize random activities such as setting up a sno-ball machine in the lounge for a day. They buy tickets to sporting events and close the office on any given Friday simply because it's a nice day. The firm's 168 employees also receive tickets to the opening day of Jazz Fest.

Even better, Mark Mayer said, is the unusual 401(k) plan.

"We tell everyone our annual goal is to match employee contributions dollar to dollar and we don't limit it," he said. "It's only limited by what the IRS allows and this year it's $17,000. It's a 100 percent return investment in the first year, and it grows tax-free. It's the crown jewel of our benefits package."

He also added that the firm looks for "nice people who are smart — and in that order — while highly valuing diversity."

Joel Mooy left an advertising agency in Washington, D.C., two years ago to work at Peter A. Mayer as group creative director. What attracted him to the agency, he said, was the diverse, casual environment in the office and the fact everyone can voice their opinion.

"Other places I've worked, especially in D.C., the culture was regimented and you could only speak when spoken to," Mooy said. "Here it's different. It's friendly, supportive and collaborative, and both Mark and Josh Mayer are sincere and caring."

Val McKay, senior director of integrated production, has been with the firm 11 years. She said she has stayed because it's a well-run business that is financially solid. It also has robust new business programs, business continuity and a "disaster plan."

"During Super Bowl 2002, I ended up in the hospital with a kidney infection," she said. "The agency sent me flowers, which I thought was super nice. Then when I came back to work, which at the time was in the back of a dusty old building, Peter Mayer himself came and found me just to ask how I was. … I will never forget it."•

— Kerry Duff

Photo by Frank Aymami

Background, from left, Stephanie Moody, Amarena Diaz, Neil Landry and Adrianne Kimbell; and foreground, Mark Mayer, Josh Mayer and Peter A Mayer.

Nature of business: Advertising and public relations
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 168
Average starting salary: $53,600
Median salary: $42,500
Average time of employment: 7 years
Health care benefits: 78 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program
Paid days off: 25+ days
Website: www.peteramayer.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Tory Nieset, Craig Oakman, Bart Bacigalupi, Corinne Levy, Chris Douse, MaryJo Roberts, Aimee Pham and Ben Craft.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

Phelps Dunbar

People who work at Phelps Dunbar tend to stay a long time, said partner and practice coordinator James Stuckey, who has been with the firm since graduating from Tulane University Law School 28 years ago.

"My secretary has been at the firm longer than I have," said Stuckey, who is in the business/commercial practice. "Of the people in my group, we have a really strong retention. People have been here decades."

The average length of employment at Phelps Dunbar is nearly 12 years. The firm places a high priority on training, including continuing legal education and opportunities for attorneys and administrative staff to improve their computer and writing skills.

Ultimately, Stuckey and the other partners at Phelps Dunbar want to cultivate an environment where the work is always interesting and challenging.

"That's the best way to have people excited about what they're doing, have a good retention rate and provide the best service for our clients," Stuckey said.

Records coordinator Heather Schexnayder, who started in June 2009, manages data collection and entry as well as the flow of electronic documents and physical records at the firm. Considering the volume of records generated by one of the state's largest law firms, those are daunting tasks. But Schexnayder said her job is made easier by a strong office support staff.

"Anything we need and ask for we usually get," Schexnayder said. "I think that's what makes it such a great place to work, because we have the tools that we need to do the job efficiently."

She also praises the tech support staff and appreciates the video conferencing equipment that allows her to do remote training at various Phelps Dunbar offices instead of having to travel to be onsite.

"It keeps me at home at night with my kids," she said.

Rachel Woolridge joined Phelps Dunbar as legal recruiting coordinator in December 2011. Her job involves running summer internship programs and recruiting at law schools and other law firms.

Nature of business: Law firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 202
Average starting salary: $42,800 for staff; $98,000 for attorneys
Median salary: $53,580 for staff
Average time of employment: 11.9 years
Health care benefits: 80 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: One month after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 32
Website: www.phelpsdunbar.com

She said one of her favorite things about working at Phelps Dunbar is the ease of communicating with people at every level.

"You can be on a call with the firm's managing partner and if you have something to say, you don't just have to sit back and not speak," Woolridge said.

Her department plans internal company events, such as offsite holiday parties, welcome parties for newcomers and the annual retreat, which alternates between Destin, Fla., and a different location every other year.

Phelps Dunbar is a sponsor of the American Diabetes Association's annual Step Out walk in November, and every staff member who donates to the ADA gets to wear jeans for a day.

"This is a pretty conservative office, so we don't get to wear jeans too often," Schexnayder said.

In a firm that has more than 500 full-time employees throughout the Southeast and more than 200 in the New Orleans office, Woolridge said the group activities are a good way to bring together colleagues who don't ordinarily see each other.

"It brings about camaraderie within the firm and boosts morale," she said.•

— Sonya Stinson

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Eileen Barthe, Joe Bergeron, Mayra Romero and Paul Pentney.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

Phillips 66 Alliance Refinery

Charlotte Murla wanted braces all her life but never could afford them.

That was until she landed a job as an operator at Phillips 66.

"It's the first company (I've worked for) that's had orthodontic coverage," said Murla, 45, who said 50 percent of her expenses were covered. Seven months after beginning her job, she was fitted for braces.

Murla said she hesitated taking the job as an operator, which involves working on the docks to pump product into tanker ships.

"I thought some men wouldn't want me there, that it was a man's job," Murla said.

Her experience has been very different. For her field training, Murla was paired with male employees.

"They let me do the job, but they were by my side the whole time," she said.

That supportive environment was vital in September, when Hurricane Isaac ravaged much of Plaquemines Parish. Though the refinery was shut down for nearly three weeks, there was plenty of cleanup work to do, operations manager Ray Rigdon said. Employees routinely pulled 12-hour shifts during that time.

A few days into the cleanup, an executive from Phillips 66 headquarters in Houston flew in and toured the refinery, talking with employees on the ground. He asked about their families and thanked them for "their commitment to getting the place back up and running," Rigdon said.

The company listens in other ways, too. Every year, the refinery holds a "tactical planning session," Rigdon said, where refinery personnel brainstorm long-range plans in areas such as operations, maintenance and safety. The key is that workers and management power through it side by side.

"Having a cross-section of people gets the best overall plan," Rigdon said.

Operations Superintendent Joe Glenn, who has worked at the Belle Chasse facility since 1971, agrees it's necessary to "create an environment where you become more of a sounding board." He gathers his staff daily to discuss the upcoming scope of work, which can be useful when they're faced with a big project.

One day, they were planning to replace instrumentation in the field and would have to do it live, while the refinery was in operation.

"We had a meeting on the floor and talked about it, but one item was giving trouble to a member of the team," Glenn said. "So we talked through the situation, allowing this individual to identify the obstacle and work through it."

The procedure went off without a hitch, and that employee was later promoted.

"There's nothing more important to employees than being heard, to help them realize their confidence and grow from there," Glenn said. "Phillips 66 trained me to treat my team this way."•

— Anne Berry

Nature of business: Refining
Where based: Belle Chasse
Employees: 420 locally; about 29,500 companywide
Average starting salary: $52,707 for hourly; $79,644 for salaried
Median salary: $55,342 for hourly; $84,000 for salaried
Average time of employment: 14 years
Health care benefits: 80 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program
Paid days off: 29 days
Website: www.phillips66.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Point Eight Power employees Wayne Gaudet, Will Isemann, David Trosclair, Jim Jordan, Natasha Bailey and Brett Reagan dress up for the company's Halloween party.

Point Eight Power

Sara O'Shea said she likes working at Point Eight Power so much that, she encouraged her husband, Brian, to apply for a recent company opening.

"You want the person you love to be around great people," said O'Shea, a communications specialist who joined Point Eight Power earlier this year. Her husband is now a production trainee. "This is a place where people are constantly being given the opportunity and encouraged to develop and do better."

Jason Guidroz can attest to that growth.

"I came here out of high school," said Guidroz, a first-class lead wireman. "It was through a half day at school, half day at work program, and when I graduated they asked me if I wanted to come onboard full time."

That was 14 years ago, and Guidroz said he's never looked back. Today, he is a floor project manager at Point Eight Power, "doing whatever I can do to make sure our different projects are running smoothly."

With average starting salaries pegged at just more than $46,000 and median salaries topping $60,000, Point Eight Power tries to foster what executive vice president and general manager Brett Reagan calls a "culture of inclusiveness."

"We've worked hard to shift the atmosphere here from one that might be more controlled to one that very much engages with people at every level," Reagan said. "It's not always easy to go from a culture where everyone is told what to do to one that tries to engage everyone. But once you go in that direction and see how well everyone responds, you realize it's the right direction to move in."

Point Eight Power employees are encouraged to recognize their coworkers or supervisors for going above and beyond with Spot Awards that come with gift cards and their name and accomplishments displayed in a central location. An employee may also be nominated for a Spotlight piece in the company's biweekly newsletter.

Spot Award and Spotlight recipients are recognized at the company's bi-weekly Donut Friday meetings, where management shares company news and strategic initiative updates.

Communication is also big at Point Eight. Its "Weekend Update" features employees whose after-work activities reflect and support the company's mission. The company also recently installed a 40-inch television in its manufacturing lunchroom to display information on financial and operational goals, introducing new employees, and acknowledging Spotlight and Spot Award winners. The company is already in the process of installing other TVs throughout the facility.

With a growing staff now at 150, Point Eight Power still manages to maintain what O'Shea describes as a "small company atmosphere."

"It really isn't like anything else I have encountered in any other job I've had before," she said. "I loved it initially that there was a very obvious family atmosphere here, but the longer I've been here, the more I've come to realize that there is also an atmosphere of everyone not just working together but advancing together."•

— Garry Boulard

Nature of business: Manufacturing
Where based: Belle Chasse
Employees: 150
Average starting salary: $11.61 for hourly; $46,427 for salaried
Median salary: $15 for hourly; $60,190 for salaried
Average time of employment: 8 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days
Other perks: Relocation assistance, paid mileage, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 26 days
Website: www.pointeightpower.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Seated, from left: Ike Jackson, Megan Micale, Randy Legard, Kitty Polk and Dwyr McComsey; and standing, Lee Wrage, Austin Kirzner and Titus Perkins.

SEVEN-TIME HONOREE

Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group

Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group has been providing world-renowned food and service for 20 years. But it has also been providing a top-notch work environment, as seen by many of the employees who have been with the company since it was created in 1992.

The company includes Ralph's on the Park, Red Fish Grill, Café B, Heritage Grill, Café NOMA and the Jazz Kitchen at the Disneyland resort in California.

"Our people stay because of the way we treat them," President Ralph Brennan said. "We treat them with respect and dignity and give everyone an opportunity to grow and develop. We invest in our employees and provide constant training programs. Our goal is to keep people a long time, and the only way to do that is to treat them well."

Full-time employees work five days a week, 55 hours and get two days off in a row, which is unheard of in the industry, Brennan said.

In September, RBRG partnered with Touro Infirmary on a 90-day employee wellness program called "Get Fit with Ralph." About 75 employees took part in the weight loss program that fostered a friendly competition among co-workers seeking a healthier lifestyle. The company awarded $3,000 to participants.

"We had a doctor come in and talk to the staff about living a healthy lifestyle," Brennan said. "When they went through the initial health screening, we noticed a number of them had health issues and hadn't been to a doctor in years, so we put together a program that would help them focus on living and eating right. I'm working on losing weight, too. I'm watching my diet, eating less in the restaurants and when I'm not in one of the restaurants, I eat light, healthy meals."

Steve Jeansonne, Café B front house manager, said Brennan does everything he can to make employees' lives comfortable and balanced.

"Ralph has a deep sense of family, and he makes sure we have work-life balance," said Jeansonne, a staff member since 1992. "Many people in this industry get ground up and spit out when they need time off for something. Ralph cares about his people and knows they need time off for family matters."

The company also financially rewards employees on their anniversary, paying in increments of $500 for every five years starting with $500 for the first five.

Pantry Cook Ashley Taylor, 23, has been working at Ralph's on the Park for five months while attending culinary classes at Delgado Community College. What she enjoys most, she said, is the teamwork in the kitchen and tasting new foods.

"Before I started this job, I didn't think anyone would be willing to teach me, but that's not the way it is at all," she said. "I'm learning all sorts of things and everyone goes out of their way to make me feel comfortable and belong. Upper management knew my name right away, so I'm not just some girl. I'm part of the kitchen. The restaurant also works around my school schedule, which is very important to me."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Restaurant
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 272
Average starting salary: $12.92 per hour; $56,000 for salaried
Median salary: $14 per hour; $50,000 for salaried
Average time of employment: 8 years for managers; 4.1 for hourly staff
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescriptions plans
Wait time for benefits: Six months after hire for management; one year for hourly employees
Other perks: Paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 14-26 days
Website: www.neworleans-food.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Jay St. Marie pulls Susan Brantmeyer down the levee during a ReadSoft playbreak.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

ReadSoft

One might consider a firm's top executives being half a world away in Sweden a disadvantage to local employees. But nothing could be further from the truth for Bob Fresneda and his team at the North American headquarters for Readsoft, a European document management firm with offices and partnerships in 70 countries.

"We've been very successful in our work out here even though our bosses are in Sweden," said Fresneda, who moved to New Orleans from California to lead Readsoft more than 15 years ago. "I was glad to come to New Orleans because I've been a fan of the city and the schools here for years, and I am also excited about the fact that we're not a system integrator. We build technology right here in Louisiana."

Frenesda said Readsoft's in-house technology development is an important tool in cultivating employee satisfaction.

"The fact is that the work remains challenging and that people feel good about their careers," he said. "We don't use vendors, so our team doesn't have to go and ask someone why this or that isn't working. They have the tools to fix it themselves … because they are the ones working to develop it."

But being trusted with creating solutions is only part of what makes Readsoft an outstanding employer, said Ben Perez, a business partner and sales manager who joined the New Orleans office a year ago.

"It's nothing to see a senior manager come by on a scooter just to make everyone laugh or a CEO to walk by someone's desk wearing something funny," Perez said. "There's truly an enjoyment to what we do, and management makes an effort to make it an outgoing environment."

Susan Brantmeyer, who leads business development and has been with the firm for five years, said that in addition to the firm's jovial atmosphere and hands-on approach to product development, hard work doesn't go unnoticed. Senior managers are always interested in trumpeting stand-out employees, she said.

"We have this award system here called ESPY, which stands for enthusiasm, superior, personality and ypperlig," Brantmeyer says, explaining that ypperlig is a Swedish word that means great. The award is for employees who go above and beyond what may be required to get things done.

"The nominations cause a real desire on the part of people to do their best," Perez said. "There's a sense of pride in being recognized because the award isn't easy to get. But when it's received, people know that this person has done a great job." Readsoft's ESPY awards come with a framed certificate and a $50 prize.

"When I tell my friends about what happens at work, they … can't believe that I have this much fun or that my bosses are as friendly as they are and that the environment is playful," Perez said. "But it's true, I have the best job in the world."•

— Mason Harrison

Nature of business: Software
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 82 locally; 500 firmwide
Average starting salary: $60,000
Median salary: $95,000
Average time of employment: 5+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, employee recognition program, fitness program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 35 days
Website: www.readsoft.net

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

St. Tammany Parish Hospital employees gather outside.

EIGHT-TIME HONOREE

St. Tammany Parish Hospital

When Melonie Lagalante attended the St. Tammany Parish Hospital service award banquet last year, she was amazed by the number of employees being honored for 30, 35 and 45 years of service.

She also felt proud to be part of a hospital where people love their work and are appreciated for contributing to its success.

Lagalante has worked for St. Tammany Parish Hospital for eight years. As outpatient diagnostic director, she oversees the hospital's facilities in Covington and Mandeville.

"It's amazing that so many people have dedicated their entire lives to this organization," Lagalante said. "But it really is a special place that celebrates employees and families. I have a rewarding career, and I don't have to give so much to the job that I sacrifice my home life. I feel totally fulfilled because of work-life balance."

The hospital's competitive benefits package and opportunity to earn an annual incentive are also important to Lagalante. In the past seven years, every employee of the hospital has received an incentive, which she said is unheard in the health care industry.

Although the hospital is a nonprofit, it contributes 6 percent of each employee's total gross wages to a 401(a) retirement plan, whether or not the employee contributes.

Lagalante and two dozen managers and department heads also volunteer for the Helping One Student to Succeed (HOSTS) program. They devote an hour a week during the school year to help first- and second-graders at Lyon Elementary School in Covington learn to read. The hospital encourages employees to do charity work and gives them time off from work to do so.

"Sitting with a child and helping them learn to read is renewing," Lagalante said. "We develop bonds with the students and get to see them grow. It's also nice to work at a place where you don't have to feel guilty about leaving your job to volunteer."

CEO Patti Ellish also participates in charity events with employees. This year she walked for causes supporting research into Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and heart disease. She helped serve at the United Way Red Beans and Rice Cook-off in Mandeville.

"Our employees are the heart of our hospital," Ellish said. "This is a bottom-up organization, and everyone here calls me Patti. We're a team and we have fun together whether we're working, celebrating customer service scores, having a pizza party or a holiday gathering."

Telecommunications operator Celita Hart has been with the hospital 10 years. What keeps her there, she said, is job security and peace of mind.

"I honestly like my job and I feel secure here," Hart said. "When many places were making cuts, our hospital worked very hard to keep people in their jobs. They found other ways to downsize such as cutting hours instead of people. They also had the employee Christmas dinner in the hospital cafeteria instead of a big, expensive rented hall … and we still had great food and fun."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Health care
Where based: Covington
Employees: 1,347
Average starting salary: $62,192
Median salary: $59,229
Average time of employment: 8 years
Health care benefits: 80 percent covered; dental and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 35
Website: www.stph.org

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

Slidell Memorial Hospital CEO Bill Davis gets a mid-day check up from nurses Marie Penix, left, and Shannon Dowden.

THREE-TIME HONOREE

Slidell Memorial Hospital

Bill Davis may be a CEO, but executive-level parking isn't really his thing. Because Slidell Memorial Hospital doesn't have an on-campus parking lot for employees, the hospital's top executive makes a point of riding the employee shuttle bus to work every morning and uses the trip as an opportunity to chat with staff members.

"It's the No. 1 hardship I hear from them, so I figure I ought to be doing the same thing," Davis said of the hospital's parking shortage. "If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me."

Being in a close-knit environment where rank-and-file employees are comfortable working alongside senior management is one of Slidell Memorial Hospital's greatest assets, employees say.

"You often see the senior management team rounding (the hospital) day, evening and night, meeting with employees and talking to them to see how we can improve services," said Barry Winters, director of materials management. "Often I'll get calls from the CEO after … rounding asking me to purchase things that the employees need to do their daily jobs."

Since becoming the hospital's CEO in March after a decade as chief financial officer, Davis has implemented new programs to involve employees in the hospital's decision-making process. He started doing a twice-monthly open forum to inform employees about what's going on at the hospital and to field their questions. No questions are off limits, and employees can submit their questions in writing if they don't feel comfortable speaking up.

"It's a no-secrets environment," Davis said.

The hospital started a program this year called Target Zero to encourage employees to identify breakdowns in hospital processes and find opportunities to improve efficiency.

Nature of business: Hospital
Where based: Slidell
Employees: 822
Average starting salary: $15 per hour for staff; $125.50 per hour for doctors
Median salary: $23.59 per hour for staff; $125.50 per hour for doctors
Average time of employment: 7 years
Health care benefits: 85 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 29 days
Website: www.slidellmemorial.org

"We're a 53-year-old organization," Davis said. "We probably have some bureaucracy that doesn't need to be there, and that's frustrating to employees."

The hospital awards $2,500 every quarter to the individual or team that submits a Target Zero suggestion the administration chooses to adopt.

Jennifer McNease has been a registered nurse at the hospital for nearly six years. She chooses to make a 30-minute commute from Mississippi every day even though she said she has had opportunities to work closer to home.

"The nearest hospital to me is two minutes from my house, but I'd drive 100 miles just to get to work with the people I work with," she said.

Being able to set her own schedule is also important to McNease, who has a 1-year-old daughter.

"With a baby at home, it's easy for me to schedule around when I can find a sitter," she said.

Among its other benefits, Slidell Memorial offers considerable continuing education stipends and has a system for reimbursing employees who earn degrees. The hospital will also reimburse employees for the cost of gym membership as long as they visit eight times a month.•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Arun Sreeranganathan, Eleanor Henneman, Ryan Hopman, Greg Garic, Glenn Aucoin, Geoff Lothian, Kannan Subramanian and Jiten Patel.

Stress Engineering Services Inc.

Jiten Patel, a mechanical engineer, joined Stress Engineering Services Inc. in July after earning his Ph.D. from Georgia Tech.

Patel, originally from India, had other offers, but a meeting with his future boss sealed the deal.

"At Stress, they mentor you," Patel said. "Greg (Garic) took a lot of time to invest in me. He advises me on how to grow as an engineer. He charts my future career every time we meet. ... He genuinely wants me to succeed."

The company paid for all of Patel's moving expenses and helped him find and negotiate with a moving company. He even got to pick out a new laptop with all of the configurations he wanted.

"Nobody gets an office for their first job," Patel said. "The small things add up."

Garic, managing principal of the New Orleans office, and Glenn Aucoin, a senior associate engineer, have been with the company since 1996, when they were hired to start the New Orleans office.

"Here, the compensation is fair," Aucoin said. "It is not selfish at all. If you work overtime, you get paid for working overtime. Some engineering firms do not always do that."

All lab technicians are provided with lunch every day and dinner if they have to work late. Other employees are provided lunch if they have to work or attend meetings during lunch.

Stress also rewards professional development.

"They want our engineers to be recognized in the field as experts, so they pay bonuses if we participate in technical conferences and write technical papers," Aucoin said.

That's why the company also pays for anyone who wants to go back to college to earn an advanced degree.

"They constantly offer training within the company," said Aucoin, who went to New Jersey for a week last year to acquire a certification. "If an engineer who joins the company is not a registered engineer ... people get a bonus for becoming a professional engineer."

In addition to training and higher education, the company rewards employees with development bonuses and with its employee stock ownership plan. The company contributes 10 percent of its profit each year to employees' accounts to purchase shares of the company.

"That distributes accountability and responsibility and a sense of ownership throughout the company at a level you just can't get any other way," Garic said. "You have a stake in the company, and that's one of the reasons people are more productive here."

In addition to their other perks, Stress also has fun activities for their employees. It holds a crawfish boil, a Mardi Gras party at the office, which is steps from the Metairie parade route, a Halloween pumpkin carving contest, a Christmas party in Houston and a pre-bill grill on the first Thursday of each month when project managers have to turn in their billings and grill lunch for employees.

Stress also provides exercise classes, such as yoga and jazzercise, on site for employees and their families.•

— Jennifer Nall

Nature of business: Engineering consulting services
Where based: Houston
Employees: 328
Average starting salary: $7,500 monthly for engineers; $3,704 monthly for technicians
Median salary: $7,440 monthly for engineers; $3,460 monthly for technicians
Average time of employment: 10+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 30
Website: www.stress.com

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Albert Standley, Zack Trahan and Ronald Beverly.

SEVEN-TIME HONOREE

Superior Energy Services

Superior Energy Services doesn't have an ivory tower where decisions are made and handed down to employees. The company's 14,000 workers are empowered to make decisions in the field as close to the customer as possible.

The oil services business is also focused on creating a safe work environment, which they talk about every day, CEO Dave Dunlap said.

"Creating a safe work environment is at the top of the list in this company," Dunlap said. "We're successful because we have great people that work here. … Most people that work for Superior didn't begin their career here, so they know what other companies are like. People are attracted here because they can feel empowered and make decisions that matter every day."

Dunlap, 51, joined Superior Energy almost three years ago to help the company grow and diversify its business geographically. Last year, the company's revenue doubled.

"We're in the energy business and demand continues to be high," he said. "Our goal it to expand into more markets that are international, and every employee gets excited about it. We are a very large company, but we still have cultural characteristics that make us like a small company."

That includes Superior's employee catastrophic relief fund, which was created to help employees after the 2005 hurricane season. Employees have donated $818,130 since its inception.

"That fund is employees taking care of each other, and that's the kind of things small companies do," Dunlap said. "It's a competitive advantage for us, and it shows we're still tied to our roots and standing next to each other."

Noel Spicuzza joined Superior four years ago as an operations manager in the career-training center. The company has since put him through training to further his education.

"I have a career here, whereas other places I worked, it was just a job," said Spicuzza. "Superior Energy invests in its people and I think that's wonderful. You don't see that everywhere."

Nature of business: Oil and gas
Where based: Houston
Employees: 516
Average starting salary: $58,500
Median salary: $44,200
Average time of employment: 6 years
Health care benefits: 98 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, employee recognition program, employee assistance program
Paid days off: up to 45
Website: www.superiorenergy.com

Superior takes an active role in career path development through its Leadership Training Program, which helps managers focus on performance management as well as recruitment and retention efforts.

Management provides free lunch every Monday and celebrates birthdays every month. The company hosts two family days each spring at Zephyr Field, where it rents a private area and provides food and drinks.

The company also offers multiple discount programs, including the Ford Motor Co. New Vehicle Purchase Plan, open to employees, retirees and spouses; the Dell Computer Discount Program; an 8 percent monthly discount on AT&T wireless service; and a 14 percent discount with Verizon.

Receptionist Brittney Trahan calls Superior Energy is the best place she has ever worked.

"I feel comfortable in this environment, and I don't feel pressured, rushed or threatened by anyone," Trahan said. "I received great training, and people are available if I have questions. ... The company is also growing, so there are opportunities to move up and keep excelling."•

— Kerry Duff

Photo by Frank Aymami

Clockwise from left: Michael Owings and Jacob Bilyalou play office badminton against Blair Lancaster and Robin Millard during Turbosquid's Office Olympics.

TurboSquid

Bradley Bain knew when his son was born prematurely that he had made the right decision signing on with TurboSquid.

"I was very pleased by how much support was provided," Bain said of the company's response during the two weeks when his baby was in neonatal care. "Everyone was there for us. From the top down, it was expressed to me that I could take as much time off as I needed."

TurboSquid's response to the personal needs of one of its employees is evidence of its culture, CEO and co-founder Matt Wisdom said.

"At some level, I think we have all come to recognize today that work intrudes on life, and just as often life intrudes on work," he said.

That's why TurboSquid, with a staff of just fewer than 60 people — up from 20 two years ago — works to create what Wisdom calls "an ideal work/life balance."

"It's the kind of approach that inspires staff loyalty," he said. "And when people stay, that builds up the institutional knowledge of the company, which is always a good thing."

Christell Gause, a member services manager who joined TurboSquid in 2007, said collaboration is a large part of the company's work environment.

"We all talk to each other as well as the leadership about what we're doing, what's working and what isn't working," Gause said, "with the idea being that an honest exchange of ideas is not just good for the company, but for everyone who works here."

Such an atmosphere has also led to the creation of TurboSquid's unique Gonzo Budgets. Each of the company's departments is allotted a certain amount of money for the sole purpose of having fun. The staff of one department decided to spend its Gonzo Budget filling up a room with helium balloons, while another department decorated its workspace along a Super Mario-inspired theme.

"Each department can do whatever it likes with its Gonzo Budget," said Gause, noting that yet another department used its Gonzo Budget to set up an in-office 9-hole mini golf course, which is now host to the annual TurboSquid Golf Tournament.

The perks don't stop there. The company's praise system adds $3 to a staff member's paycheck any time a colleague notices them going above and beyond. All employees have the capability to work from home, hourly and exempt staff can use flexible hours, and flex time is offered to salaried employees. Management also installed a four square court in the company's development area where employees can play the popular schoolyard game.

"The relaxed atmosphere speaks to the quality of the managers and everyone else at the executive level," Bain said. "But it also says … a lot about the employees themselves. The employees here are very talented and smart and take ownership for what they do, which is one of the primary reasons why this is such a stimulating place."•

— Garry Boulard

Nature of business: Online 3D marketplace
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 58
Average starting salary: $54,587
Median salary: $38,000
Average time of employment: 3 years
Health care benefits: 91 percent covered; dental and vision plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days after hire
Other perks: Relocation assistance, telecommuting, flexible hours, employee recognition program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 24 days
Website: www.turbosquid.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Front row, from left: Elliot Hutchinson, Grace Montgomery, Logan Ledford and Lon Marchand; and back row, Sarah Calandro and Reese Goode.

TEN-TIME HONOREE

Zehnder Communications

Free Beer Friday has been a hallmark of Zehnder Communications for a while, but there's also gift certificates for birthdays, an annual pumpkin carving contest, scavenger hunts and themed parties, such as last year's holiday party centered around the TV show "Mad Men."

Zehnder's 71-member staff can also take vacations as needed and adjust their daily work schedule to meet personal needs or recharge their batteries.

"I'm a workaholic so I appreciate Zehnder having good coffee available all the time and a fridge stocked with soft drinks and water," senior software engineer Shawn Bailly said. "Anytime I want to take a week to visit my girlfriend's family in New York, it's no problem. When we evacuated for Hurricane Isaac, I worked out of our Nashville office, and Zehnder picked up the tab for everything, including my meals and hotel. I really like what the agency does for its employees."

Bailly also enjoys the friendly, collaborative atmosphere in the office and the recognition management gives staff for a job well done. The 33-year-old software guru has been recognized a number of times in the past five years for writing various software programs and formulating all the technical details of developing a product. He received a bottle of high-dollar scotch for each project.

"When the CEO gave me the scotch, it wasn't just a gift for a job well done," he said. "Jeff (Zehnder) knows who I am and what I do, and you just don't see that every day. He makes me feel appreciated and at home here."

Social media strategist Ellen Altamirano started work at Zehnder in January after serving as public relations and marketing coordinator at Naked Pizza.

"The work environment is creative and encourages me to think outside the box," Altamirano said. "My co-workers are smart, friendly and fun, and I appreciate the expertise of different age groups. Some of them are fresh out of college, others are in their early 30s and some have worked here a long time."

Zehnder started the firm in 1996 and now has offices in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Nashville, Tenn., to serve clients that include Entergy, Hyatt Regency New Orleans, Walt Disney World, St. Tammany Parish Hospital and Zea Rotisserie & Grill.

"I'm a big believer that life is too short not to be happy," Zehnder said. "So I created a place people want to work every day. I don't care if the agency is big; I just want to be the best. So if you just want to have fun, you are not going to last here. It's a work hard, play hard culture, and we have a lot of tenure in an industry where there's a lot of turnover."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Advertising and public relations
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 71
Average starting salary: $43,750
Median salary: $55,750
Average time of employment: 8+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program
Paid days off: No set limit
Website: www.z-comm.com

1

THREE-TIME HONOREE

Ericksen Krentel & LaPorte

Photos by Tracie Morris Schaefer

When Kevin Neyrey was coming up as a young CPA, he went to his bosses and asked if he could expand his studies beyond technical skills.

"If I hadn't gone to those partners (with that request), I don't think I'd be where I am today," Neyrey said.

Years later, as managing partner of Ericksen, Krentel & LaPorte, Neyrey decided the firm should offer the same "soft skills" training — in sales, marketing, public speaking and leadership — he had once received to its employees.

Besides signing them up for webinars and paying all of their expenses to attend conferences, Neyrey personally hosts "Lunch and Learn" seminars during the workday, where the talk turns to inspiring business books as well as professional issues and obstacles.

To encourage employees to get more involved in the community, the firm has drafted staff teams to compete in the Client Relations and Bonus System (CRABS), a marketing incentive where teams earn points for networking, public speaking, attending seminars, getting published and sitting on civic boards. They also can qualify for prizes such as iPads and paid days off.

"We want to give them all the resources they'll need to be the most well-rounded professional they

Nature of business: Accounting
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 34
Average starting salary: $45,000
Median salary: $60,000
Average time of employment: 10 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 25 days
Website: www.ericksenkrentel.com

From left: Debbie Morgan, Claude Silverman, Joseph Daher, Jeremy Thibodeaux and Monica Landry.

can be," Neyrey said.

One employee benefiting from that approach is Bobby Schroeder.

"CPA firms have always had to rely on growing their clients," Schroeder said. "But here, they're using young people to grow clients. That's new to the field."

It goes hand in hand with a changing profession, Neyrey said. These days, a CPA does more than accounting and taxes; he or she is often a client's most trusted adviser.

Schroeder, a CPA who joined the company in July, said he chose to work at Ericksen because "it's a progressive, forward-thinking firm where I could grow."

In just a few months, Schroeder has been sent to Florida to speak at an industry conference for budding accountants. While there, he attended a seminar on work/life integration that hit home with the father of two young girls.

"You're going to answer emails on a Sunday afternoon, there's no getting around that," Schroeder said. "But I can also leave early for my daughter's dance recital, then telecommute later to knock out that project."

That flexibility is also precious for audit manager Kelly Cantwell, who banks overtime to apply toward longer paid vacations. She and her husband, Sean, an F-15 pilot with the Louisiana Air National Guard, use it to stretch out holidays with their families in North Carolina.

During Sean's recent three-month deployment, the company gave Kelly regular access to the conference room during business hours so she could speak to him privately via video conferencing.

Military homecomings are often moving targets on the calendar, but Cantwell said the firm was accommodating when Sean was ending his deployment.

"They said, 'No matter what's happening here, go,'" Kelly said. "There was no question with me putting that first."•

— Anne Berry

From left: Debbie Morgan, Joseph Daher, Claude Silverman, Jeremy Thibodeaux and Monica Landry.

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Photo by Frank Aymami

President Anderson Baker, left, Chairman Parke Ellis and Chief Operating Officer Doug Mills challenge each other to a planking competition during the company's weekly exercise program.

2

Gillis Ellis & Baker Inc.

A consultative approach is what intrigued Jeff Howard to join the New Orleans-based business insurance provider Gillis, Ellis & Baker.

"It's a huge advantage to help me build my book of business because I am continually showing clients that I am not only helping them obtain the insurance they need, but I'm going over all of their business operations, their risk management needs, their financials and everything they need to know," said Howard, who started in July 2011. "It makes a difference when you show them you care about their total operations and not just about their insurance policies."

The company's motto to serve insurance clients is known as "Get It Right." Chairman Parke Ellis said it also applies to how the company treats its 47 employees, with more than half the staff being at the company for more than 15 years.

The company pays 80 percent of employees' health care premiums and 50 percent of their dependents' premiums. Gillis, Ellis & Baker rolled out a long-term insurance program in 2011 in which the company pays a premium every month, and employees pay the remainder for their future care needs or those of a loved one.

"More than half the staff embraced the idea and took us up on it," Ellis said.

The company took over the seventh floor of the 1615 Poydras building in March after occupying two-thirds of the sixth floor. The move allowed the firm to add a fitness center and locker rooms, two kitchens, meeting spaces and training rooms. There are weekly group exercise classes with an Elmwood Fitness trainer and a GEB Healthy Program that provides nutritionists, doctors, health screenings and medical speakers on a monthly basis. The company also pays 50 percent of employees' monthly parking.

"We are always striving for various perks and benefits to provide to our employees," said Celeste White, an employee benefits accounts manager for seven years. "We know the insurance benefits are important to them, but we also know exercise, parking and other needs are always a concern as well."

White witnessed that in May when her house was found to have tainted Chinese drywall. Several Gillis, Ellis & Baker employees came over on a Saturday for about four hours to help tear it out.

"I was touched that so many people would take time out of their schedule to help us," White said. "It's a very professional and caring environment, and we are always helping each other in and out of the office."•

— Tommy Santora

Nature of business: Insurance
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 47
Average starting salary: $30,000 for staff; $40,000 for producers
Median salary: $60,000 for staff; $150,000 for producers
Average time of employment: 25 years
Health care benefits: 80 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, employee recognition program, fitness program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 25 days
Website: www.gillis.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

Front row, from left: H.V. Nagerdra, Marty Tovrea, George Dolgy, Bill Keeley and Jerald Anderson. Back row: Chris Young, Joy Ridolfo, Ron Blitch, Lexi Wirthlin, Eileen Dooley and Kenyon Zimmerman.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

Blitch Knevel Architects

Tie: 3

In architecture school, it's known as "studio culture." It refers to a learning environment that fosters creativity, ideas and camaraderie, much like working in a design studio on a college campus.

It's an environment Blitch Knevel Architects has worked to achieve, bringing the same culture into the workplace. Attitudes are laid back, sodas are free and collaboration is encouraged, employees say.

"It's more of a collegiate atmosphere here," president Ron Blitch said. "There's a lot of walking around and seeing what people are doing."

Blitch Knevel is undergoing a physical and organizational facelift. The firm's Warehouse District office is being remodeled, which will create a space where everyone in the office can see each other at the same time as opposed to a cubicle design. The firm also is in the midst of a two-year reorganization and restructuring to focus on a new mission and business approach.

"I think what we've all learned through this restructuring is how to focus on making things better so it's more enjoyable to come to work," Blitch said.

Changes include adding more flexibility to employees' positions so they get a chance to work on several different projects instead of being confined to the same one for months.

"It's becoming a little more fluid, which is good because people are excited about working on a variety of different things," said Martin Tovrea, an associate principal.

Employees have also been getting more opportunities to get out of the office for a few hours to visit job sites, even if they didn't work on the project.

"That's valuable for the design staff to not just see their projects on paper, but see them as they're going up," said Shannon French, intern architect.

Employees believe there's a considerable amount of job security at Blitch Knevel. The firm has been able to maintain an even keel during the peaks and valleys of the fluctuating economy, French said.

"We don't have to worry about being let go tomorrow if the workload suddenly gets a little bit lighter," he said.

Blitch Knevel holds monthly office lunches to keep everyone informed, but there's also a good bit of informal camaraderie among the staff, French said.

"It's not like, 'It's the first Monday of the month; let's all file into a conference room,'" he said. "The firm buys everyone lunch, it gets catered in and there's usually some kind of fun activity."

Paid parking in the Warehouse District is among the more popular perks, and employees also receive end-of-the-year bonuses based on performance and effort. The firm also pays for employees to take their licensing exams on the condition that they pass.

The firm regularly has employees who leave the company, only to return a few years later. Tovrea worked at the firm after finishing college in the early 1990s, moved to Arizona and then returned four years ago.

"It's interesting to come back to a place that has the same philosophies, the same personalities and the same goals we had all those years ago," he said. "We haven't changed in those respects."•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Nature of business: Architectural firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 22
Average starting salary: $45,000
Median salary: $96,000
Average time of employment: 13 years
Health care benefits: 80 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, fitness program, subsidized meals, profit sharing
Paid days off: 25-35 days
Website: www.blitchknevel.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

The Deveney Communication staff gather "Mad Men" style at the Windsor Court Hotel's Cocktail Bar.

SEVEN-TIME HONOREE

Deveney Communication

Tie: 3

The company motto at the New Orleans marketing firm Deveney Communication is "to do exceptional work and have a great time doing it." The rewards employees get for doing outstanding work are also fun — and sometimes quite lucrative.

Staff members are eligible for bonuses of up to 20 percent of their salaries when the company meets its annual billing and revenue goals. After 10 years of service, they receive four weeks' vacation and $15,000 to spend on their "trip of a lifetime."

Chief Financial Officer Chris Costello was the first to receive his trip bonus, which he used for an excursion to Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and China, president and CEO John Deveney said.

The idea for the travel reward came to Deveney after the firm spent several months on a grueling post-Katrina assignment.

"We had managed the on-the-ground support for the state and the city's tourism industry," Deveney said. "I took a trip to speak at a conference in Australia, and I found that the time away really allowed me to recharge, to come back better prepared, more energetic and more creative."

The company buys dinner for staff members who work after hours and, after a challenging week, might even have their cars detailed. Sometimes the boss springs for theater tickets or an after-work happy hour at a Frenchman Street bar near the firm's Marigny office.

Deveney Communication recently added a personalized corporate wellness program to a benefits package that already included 100 percent health care coverage. A certified personal trainer goes to nearby Washington Park three times a week — Tuesdays and Thursdays after work and Saturday mornings — to guide employees through workouts and provide nutritional advice.

"The philosophy of what (benefits) to provide for the employees really comes from active listening," Deveney said. "What is it that they value? What do they think would be an added benefit that would help them be more productive or help their work-life balance?"

Nature of business: Marketing
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 14
Average starting salary: $46,000
Median salary: $75,000
Average time of employment: 3 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescriptions plan
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, fitness program
Paid days off: 26 days
Website: www.deveney.com

Account coordinator Laura Fidelman is part of a group helping to organize a video competition for the Young Leadership Council Film Fest and another team working on a project with the Texas-Louisiana chapter of the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Fidelman will mark her two-year anniversary at Deveney in January, having started as an unpaid intern after graduating from the University of Texas with a degree in public relations.

"Because we're so small, you get the opportunity to try anything you want," Fidelman said. "It's not like there's a brick wall that says you have to stay where you are."

Account executive Katie Fauquier, who joined the firm in June, specializes in health care marketing.

"A lot of my focus is on media relations and working with our clients to understand their needs," Fauquier said. "We get the ability to almost become experts in the fields that our clients work in, which is really interesting. There is never a dull moment."•

— Sonya Stinson

Photo by Frank Aymami

Below from left: Rupal Shah, Alex Dragoset and Mark D'Arensbourg. Above: Marcel Mata, Tony DeFelice and Chris Lynch.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

Archon Information Systems

Innovative software is spurring the growth of Archon Information Systems, and company founders Bryan Barrios, Beau Button and William Sossamon are very proud that their emerging company is creating jobs in their home city.

"When we started in 2008, we wanted to create an intriguing workplace where people would want to come to New Orleans, work for us and write innovative software for a niche marketplace," said Sossamon, who serves as chief technology officer. "I think we have accomplished that, and we are excited that every year we continue to grow."

Software developers have dual, 24-inch monitor workstations with computers that are upgraded every year. There's a 55-inch screen for meetings and a development room with three walls of white board space where employees scribble notes and plans.

"The cutting edge of their technology intrigued me," said Archon software developer Tony DeFelice, who has spent 15 years in the industry and joined Archon last year. "We were using Microsoft Visual Studio 2012 about a month after it came out, and we're always using the latest software programs and web-based technologies on the market."

Archon recently provided the opportunity for 31 employees to attend classes on Microsoft Office, Windows 7 Enterprise Desktop Support Technician and other software packages through the Louisiana Small Business Employee Training Program.

Archon is located in the Exchange Centre on Gravier Street and pays for all of its employees to park in a covered parking lot attached to the building and for access to a fitness center in the building. Health care premiums for employees are paid at 85 percent, an increase from the 60 percent paid within Archon's first year.

At All Hands Quarterly meetings, Kudos awards or bonuses are given for exemplary work. There also is a Call Center Agent of the Month award with a bonus given to the agent who has met certain goals and a Weekly Call Center Competition with two $50 gift card giveaways based on performance.

Employee events include crawfish boils, fundraisers at Rock 'N' Bowl, cocktail hour after staff meetings, holiday parties, Zephyrs game outings and the company Christmas party, typically on a balcony on Bourbon Street.

"Throwing beads off a balcony was an experience for me," said Brennan Rand, a call center manager who moved with his wife from Hawaii to New Orleans and joined Archon in December 2010. Rand said he joined Archon "just to get a job" while his wife was working on her master's degree at the University of New Orleans.

"I started as a call agent, but then I realized the opportunity I had for advancement within the company and told management I wanted to do more," said Rand, who was promoted in September 2011 to oversee 25 call center employees.

"They recognized me as an asset, trained me to become more of a leader, and I continued to learn on the job and further improve our department to help us be successful," he said. •

— Tommy Santora

Nature of business: Software development
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 46
Average starting salary: $25,360 for hourly; $55,395 for salaried
Median salary: $27,040 for hourly; $76,040 for salaried
Average time of employment: 1.5 years
Health care benefits: 85 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: One month after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 19-24 days
Website: www.archoninfosys.com

Greater New Orleans Inc.

Photo by Frank Aymami

The Greater New Orleans Inc. staff stays plugged in around the clock.

Greater New Orleans Inc. is leading the charge in the renaissance of Crescent City, and its work force is proud to be part of the effort.

New Orleans native James Moffett joined the ranks of the regional economic development agency 11 months ago. The senior business development associate works with parish partners to attract domestic and international corporations to southeast Louisiana.

"I'm proud to be part of an organization that does a terrific job marketing the place I call home," said Moffett, 31. "The culture is very collegial and energetic, and it's comprised of young people ranging in age from late 20s to early 40s that work together on the mission of the organization, which is job creation and business development. There's also a lot of enthusiasm, and that fosters ideas and execution of those ideas."

Moffett also appreciates GNO's close proximity to the French Quarter and Central Business District and the company-paid parking.

"GNO has an ideal location on Canal Street, so we have easy access to local restaurants and events, as well as other organizations and stakeholders," he said.

Educational Liaison Jana Sikdar also likes the free parking and the fact she has a guaranteed space during Carnival and other special events downtown and in the French Quarter.

Skidar, 28, moved from New York in August to work for GNO Inc. As educational liaison, she engages colleges and technical schools in economic growth efforts and connects them to industry for work force development.

"I wanted to live and work in New Orleans, so I searched for an opportunity that would allow me to use my skills and contribute to the city and community," Skidar said. "So far, GNO is a perfect fit. I get to work with smart, engaged people, and I like the small, open work environment. I also have a tangible sense of progress, which is important to me, and a personal connection with my co-workers. We eat lunch together and get together after work."

President and CEO Michael Hecht leads the 20-member team with an open-door policy. Instead of having an office, his desk sits in the middle of the open floor plan where he is surrounded by staff.

"This creates an interactive, entrepreneurial environment that encourages communication and keeps energy levels high," Hecht said. "GNO is a fast-paced, mission-driven organization, and this naturally leads to a collegial environment. Our vision is for New Orleans to be the greatest place to live and work in America … and this makes our work very satisfying and, in many ways, very personal."

Hecht said many of the staff members are friends outside of work and often get together for happy hours, cookouts and sporting events.

"We have a lot of fun together, especially at the staff barbecues where I make my famous super burgers and man the grill," he said. "We work hard and play hard and share the same drive to create good jobs and tangible differences that we can see, touch and feel in our lives."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Economic development
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 20
Average starting salary: $72,000
Median salary: $79,000
Average time of employment: 3.75 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 30 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, employee recognition program
Paid days off: 31
Website: www.gnoinc.org

Photo by Tracie Morris Schaefer

From left: Holly Biggs, Laura Biggs and Stacey Giardina make holiday cards to send to troops overseas.

SIX-TIME HONOREE

Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency

Pat Reed will turn 75 in January, and the 25-year employee with Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency says she has no plans to retire soon.

"I am healthy, they make me feel needed, I like what I do and I love this company," said Reed, who started as a secretary 15 years ago before being promoted to office manager 10 years ago.

She said she felt a connection with the company nine years ago when her husband passed away from cancer.

"There was a span of about nine months when I was in and out of work, took a lot of time off to be with him, and every step of the way, they were very flexible with my situation," Reed said. "That meant everything to me to enable me to be by my husband's side and not have to worry about my job in the back of my mind."

The company pays the full cost of employees' health, dental, prescription, vision and short- and long-term disability insurance. There is a 401(k) plan with up to a 3 percent match. Benefits are available the first of the month after hire.

"The benefits here are the most superior I have seen in the industry, including the 100 percent paid health care costs for employees," said Dick Gibbs, sales and operations leader who joined Hartwig Moss in January after working for 25 years in the insurance industry. "This family-owned company is management by appreciation, and that's a big difference in this industry. The way this agency is structured — CFOs and producers are actively involved with customers — the owners are involved in every facet of the business."

Employees receive 26 days off each year, which includes 10 vacation days, four sick days, 10 holidays, a "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" and a vacation day for their birthday.

There is a 3G (Gas Money) Bonus program where employees receive $250 bonuses on Good Friday, the Fourth of July and the Hurricane Katrina anniversary.

Jamie Sofranec, a personalized supervisor and 10-year employee, values the gas money bonus program that helps her take trips each Easter to see her sister's family in Florida.

"It's just one of the ways they reward us for working hard," Sofranec said. "That bonus has been kept a constant, and everybody looks forward to that extra money. It's easy to take pride in your work when they continually do little things to recognize you for it."

Employee events include dinner at K-Paul's for the annual holiday party, Rock 'N' Bowl for a Katrina remembrance party and the convenience of an office building on Canal Street to watch the Endymion parade.

In the community, Hartwig Moss employees volunteer time and donations to organizations such as United Way, Boy Scouts of America, Junior Achievement, Covington Rotary Club, Louisiana Children's Museum, Touro Infirmary, Soldier's Angels and the Gulf Restoration Network.

"It seems like we're always getting together to do some kind of employee event, and the company is very community-driven to make it for a cause," Reed said.•

— Tommy Santora

Nature of business: Insurance
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 42
Average starting salary: $44,967 for staff; $131,524 for producers
Median salary: $44,995 for staff; $104,130 for producers
Average time of employment: 12 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental and vision plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing, employee assistance program
Paid days off: 27
Website: www.hmia.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

The Infinity Engineering team gathers on a streetcar on the new Loyola Avenue loop, which the company is working on.

Infinity Engineering Consultants

Infinity Engineering Consultants brings in lunch for employees every two weeks, celebrates birthdays and organizes offsite team-building events such as bowling or painting pictures.

"We also sponsor Fantasy Football when the Saints season is in full swing, and we throw money in and match it to sweeten the prize," said Bill Thomassie, one of the firm's two principal partners. "People spend the majority of their waking hours here, so it can't just be about work. Staff needs to be comfortable and enjoy being here. We also don't want people driving here with apprehension because they don't want to be here."

Staff members also work nine-hour days to take a half-day off on Friday. For Employee Appreciation Day this year, all staff members were treated to breakfast, 15-minute massages at the office, a catered lunch and ice cream in the afternoon.

Infinity Engineering has been in business since 2004 and has 21 employees. It specializes in civil, structural, mechanical and marine engineering.

Greg Pier, a project engineer who joined the company in February, said he used to dread going to work at his former place of employment.

"I'm excited about working for Infinity and I don't dread coming to work anymore," he said. "I just finished designing the first phase of Methodist Hospital in New Orleans East. I did the mechanical, electrical and plumbing, and I used a new software program. Infinity provides the tools we need to get the job done successfully."

Pier said he also likes that the company pays 100 percent of employee health care benefits and offers the flexibility to take a two-hour lunch when necessary and not be questioned about it.

"Even though Infinity is a small firm, they offered me the same salary as a larger firm plus a bonus, which was a real incentive to work here," he said. "Management is on the ball, and they want to help us grow. They're never too busy, and they operate with open ears and open doors."

Project engineer Kerwyn King, who joined the company five years ago, said he looks forward to the company's special events and getting a cake on his birthday. He also likes the company culture, which he described as honest and friendly, and the charity work employees do together throughout the year.

Infinity staff sponsors families during the holidays through the Children's Bureau of New Orleans and buy gifts for children. They also raise money for breast cancer research by walking as a group in the Komen New Orleans Race for the Cure. The entire group dressed up in pink costumes for this year's walk.

"I've only had one other engineering job, and you had to make an appointment to see someone in a different discipline. But here the people are all friendly," King said. "I'm a pretty loyal guy by nature, so it would take a lot to pry me away from Infinity. The events are fun and we get to laugh and relax. I also enjoy raising money for charitable causes with my co-workers."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Engineering/consulting
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 21
Average starting salary: $33,280
Median salary: $ 100,000
Average time of employment: 5 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, fitness program
Paid days off: 23 days
Website: www.infinityec.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

The Kushner LaGraize staff gathers before their Halloween costume party.

THREE-TIME HONOREE

Kushner LaGraize

Mention "tax season" in an accounting office, and a sense of dread fills the room over 12-hour days and piles of paperwork. But throw in a few Plum Street sno-balls and a catered lunch from Zea, and it's an instant mood lifter.

That's one thing employees say they like about working at Kushner LaGraize. The accounting firm brings in ice cream, catered meals and other goodies once a week during tax time to take the sting out of the busy season.

"Having some kind of treat to break up the day seems to get people's spirits up because we work long days during tax season," said Meghan Crowell, a tax staff member at the firm.

To further ease the stress of long hours, the firm pays its employees time-and-a-half rates for any overtime they put in. "There are not many firms that do that in general, and I think this is probably one of the very few in the region," Crowell said.

Flexible start times are another perk of working at Kushner LaGraize. Employees can come in any time between 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and leave at 4:30 p.m. as long as they put in eight hours.

"For those who have young children, it's nice to be able to go home and come back if you feel like you have more work to do," Crowell said.

In an industry where many accountants stay with a firm for three or four years before jumping ship, the average length of employment at Kushner LaGraize is 10 years. Michelle Treschwig has been there for 12.

"That has a lot to do with the people I work with," said Treschwig, who is audit manager. "I've had the opportunity to leave, but I've chosen to stay. This is family.

Being with a firm that works with employees and their schedules has been important to Treschwig, who at one point needed to take off three weeks.

"They do what they need to do to help you achieve what you need in both your personal and professional lives," she said.

As a newer employee, Crowell said she appreciates that the firm evaluates employees every six months.

"Just hearing positive feedback from a partner or upper management is a reward, knowing all the effort you put in has been appreciated on their end," she said.

She also likes that the firm is organized enough to stay on top of any challenges that arise. Because of Hurricane Isaac, the Internal Revenue Service and the state Revenue Department pushed back this year's tax extension three months to Jan. 1. That meant the staff would be wrapping up taxes from this past season just as next year's season is getting started. But instead of putting that extra pressure on the staff, the firm took the initiative to set its own deadlines at an earlier time.

"It's just helping keep everyone's stamina up and making sure no one gets burned out before April 15 of next year," Crowell said.•

— Autumn Cafiero Giusti

Nature of business: Accounting
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 49
Average starting salary: $45,000
Median salary: $57,500
Average time of employment: 10 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: First of the month after 30 days
Other perks: continuing education program, paid mileage, flexible hours
Paid days off: 24 days
Website: www.kl-cpa.com

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Bill Rau, Lori Paige, Jessica Inman, Sherlita Bougere, Glenn Kirtland, Susan Lapene and Jeffrey Holzenthal.

THREE-TIME HONOREE

M.S. Rau Antiques

Barry Vose will never forget his first multi-million dollar sale at M.S. Rau Antiques.

The company acquired two original Norman Rockwell oil paintings — "The Buggy Ride" and "The Common Touch (Stock Exchange Quotations)." The latter work of art had special meaning to Vose, who left a 25-year career in the financial services and sales industry with CitiGroup and Peachtree in Atlanta to serve as executive vice president of sales for M.S. Rau Antiques in August 2011.

"This was an important part of our nation's financial history depicted by one of the greatest American artists … and I had an opportunity to be involved in the transaction," Vose said. "It was fascinating."

It was just another day at M.S. Rau Antiques where "you never know what interesting part of history will come through the door next," said Jamie Doerr, research director and senior copywriter.

M.S. Rau Antiques & Fine Arts on Royal Street celebrated its 100th year of business in 2012, opening in 1912 under Max Rau. Today, third-generation owner Bill Rau runs the business. In honor of its centennial in March, the company launched the Rau for Art Foundation, which has awarded scholarships to three art students enrolled in local high schools, and the finalists' artworks were exhibited at the gallery.

The store features a 30,000-square-foot showroom floor of antiques and collections of van Gogh, Gaugin, Renoir and Monet paintings in addition to Paul Revere sterling bowls and Tiffany and Faberge pieces. There is also a rare jewelry collection that has featured the Cassel pink diamond, a 12.27-karat Majestic pink diamond and cushion-cut diamond earrings that Angelina Jolie borrowed for the New Orleans premiere of "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

Nature of business: Antiques retailer
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 35
Average starting salary: $31,000
Median salary: $60,000
Average time of employment: 15+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, on-site gym
Paid days off: 21 days
Website: www.rauantiques.com

The 12.27-karat Majestic pink diamond was set in a signed antique Cartier mounting and retailed for $7.85 million.

"This is a rare diamond and I am very fortunate to see it come through our doors," said Devlin Dolan, who took over as the company's vice president of jewelry sales in August. "I was intrigued by this job because of the focus of growing their jewelry department, and this is an incredible opportunity judging by the potential of our merchandise and mix of estate pieces."

The company has a full-time art historian who is dedicated to monthly employee training and a weekly "new products" meeting that keeps staff members informed of new inventory. The company has about 2,000 antiques in their inventory at a given time, Vose said.

The company has quarterly employee meetings, which include awards and recognition for Royal Rau, the best employee of the quarter as voted on by their peers. There's also a companywide appreciation token program in which employees give doubloons of appreciation to other helpful employees. Doubloons are then picked out of a hat at the quarterly meeting to award prizes. And there is a 1,000-square-foot in-house gym.•

— Tommy Santora

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: James Cruse, Chloe Pullen, Eric Pullen and Gina Provensal.

Pullen Air Conditioning

On days when an attic's temperature can reach 130 degrees, Chris Fazene has second thoughts about being in the air conditioning business.

"The work sometimes can be very hard. Not everyone can do it," said Fazene, who joined Pullen Air Conditioning last year as an installer. "You have to learn … how to hang with the heat."

But the life of an installer is made easier working at Pullen, he said.

"The atmosphere is very supportive, and that very much makes a difference," Fazene said.

That support isn't accidental.

"For one reason or the other, the HVAC industry has a reputation for not treating its employees very well," said Chloe Frost Pullen, the company's director of marketing and development and wife of owner Eric Pullen. "For that reason, among others, we've done whatever we can to go in exactly the opposite direction and treat our employees with the respect and consideration they deserve."

That consideration extends to the company's yearly schedule. In an industry that responds to the cycles of the seasons, many HVAC companies often lay off their field employees during the down weeks of fall and early spring.

That's not the case at Pullen Air Conditioning.

"They keep you on the clock," Fazene said. "You may end up doing work around the shop during that time to help out, but they make sure that you get your 40 hours — and that's no small thing in this business."

Such consideration includes how the office is run.

Nature of business: Air conditioning and heating
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 12
Average starting salary: $33,500
Median salary: $38,000
Average time of employment: 2 years
Health care benefits: 75 percent
Wait time for benefits: Six months after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, flexible hours, job sharing
Paid days off: 19
Website: www.pullenac.com

"There are procedures that are set in place that makes it easier to do your job," said Gina Provensal, a dispatcher who joined Pullen Air Conditioning last spring. "Of course you are going to have hiccups now and then like you do in any operation, but there is always a structure in place for us to work off of."

Because there are only 12 employees, Pullen said the company is better able to create personal relationships and develop an understanding of each other's needs. If, for example, someone has to leave early to pick up a sick child, then someone else covers for them.

"All of the people who work here work together," said Angie Porche. "If there's something you don't know, you're encouraged to ask questions. It's a learning environment."

Porche came to Pullen Air Conditioning more than three years ago and is the company's office manager.

"And because this is an industry that is always changing, there is a big emphasis here on training and advanced education, keeping people up-to-date, which is also important."•

— Garry Boulard

Ryan Gootee General Contractors

Photo by Frank Aymami

Seated, from left: Patrick Thomas, Trudy Barbier and David Barbier. Standing: Kyle Hebert, John Segura and Jeremy Cox.

Casey Adams said the camaraderie between office and field workers and management's open door policy at Ryan Gootee General Contractors is key to his happiness.

He also enjoys driving a company car that is detailed once a month, fishing and watching ballgames with co-workers and participating in a company fantasy football league.

What Adams, a business development director, likes most, though, is that everyone at the company works together to get the job done.

"Anything it takes is the attitude around here," said Adams, who has been with the company a year. "Sometimes contracting companies get a bad name, but this company does everything ethically and it shows."

Ryan Gootee is a licensed commercial general contractor specializing in new construction and renovation.

Project superintendent John Cusimano is excited to work for the company because, he said, it's a professional atmosphere where no one undermines anyone else.

"There's no one standing up announcing they're the boss, you just know they are," he said. "If we need to work on Saturday or Sunday, no one complains. It's a very positive place and everyone's happy, which contributes to our success."

Cusimano also likes the company-paid health care benefits, paid vacation, annual weekend fishing trip for supervisors, employee crawfish boil, family picnic and Christmas dinner.

Nature of business: Construction
Where based: Metairie
Employees: 31
Average starting salary: $40,000
Median salary: $48,000
Average time of employment: 4 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: 90 days after hire
Other perks: Continuing education program, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee recognition program, employee assistance program, subsidized meals
Paid days off: 25 days
Website: www.rggc.com

"You're more than a number here, and that's my heart speaking," he said. "My job is rewarding, and I enjoy helping my boss be successful."

Chief financial officer Derek Gardes has been with Ryan Gootee since the company's inception in 2005. He is responsible for accounting, finance, benefits and corporate operations. The best part of his job, he said, is the people.

"We have good people and we don't have a lot of turnover, which is a testament to them," Gardes said. "I can also trust the people I work with to do their jobs. For someone like me who is detailed oriented and watches all the nickels and dimes, I have to trust they're using our resources in a reasonable and sound manner."

He also appreciates that the firm puts people first even in tough times. The company's benefit package has stayed the same for seven years, and the executive team meets twice a year to discuss everything that affects employees.

"We're not a stagnant group," Gardes said. "We want to make our company better for employees. We've kept the benefits strong because we value our employees, and we know how important they are to each one of them."•

— Kerry Duff

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Danielle Maggio, Kevin Mellor, Matt Foucheaux and Gary Solomon Jr.

Solomon Group

Company Retreat Day turned out to be rewarding for Danielle Maggio and the rest of Solomon Group.

The project coordinator found out that the company was awarded the contract to design and facilitate the studio sets for CBS Television in Jackson Square for the week leading up to the 2013 Super Bowl. Maggio joined Solomon Group management the week before in New York to make a pitch for the contract.

So Solomon Group celebrated the contract with an already-scheduled employee appreciation day at NOLA Motorsports Park with Raising Cane's chicken, birthday cake for several employees, trivia and raffle prizes, and a couple hours of go-cart racing.

Maggio also took home an iPod as a raffle prize.

"That's probably a day that will always stand out for me," said Maggio, who has worked at Solomon Group for a year and spent her first week on the job accompanying film crews throughout New Orleans to document Bowl Championship Series week and the ensuing national championship football game.

"You can't beat being behind the scenes for some of the biggest events in this city," she said.

From lighting and multimedia design work for Champions Square to the design of the lighting system around the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, Solomon Group has provided installations, design-build and production for exhibits, corporate events and live entertainment since 2009.

The company started with five people and has evolved to include 50 full- and part-time employees. It has an administrative and sales office on South Peters Street, a 30,000-square-foot fabrication facility in Algiers and property on Girod and Baronne streets used as a design studio for live performances.

"The total turnkey and full integration we can provide our clients is why we have been able to grow in New Orleans, and the variety of career paths we offer from creative design to production to fabrication to operation is a big reason we can recruit and retain talent," founder and president Gary Solomon Jr. said.

Nature of business: Entertainment, production and design
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 24
Average starting salary: $35,000
Median salary: $55,000
Average time of employment: 3+ years
Health care benefits: 50 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, flexible hours
Paid days off: 20+
Website: www.solomongroup.com

Solomon said employees in the East Bank office spend a day each month in the Algiers production and operations facility to view first-hand the equipment and machinery.

"Not many companies can claim that they have an inventory of LED light fixtures and that their receptionist has the opportunity to learn how to install them," Solomon said.

Full-time employees receive a new Apple MacBook Air loaded with software and a cell phone allowance for their smartphones.

"They give their employees the necessary tools to succeed in the business," said Matt Foucheaux, senior production manager and a lighting designer who was involved in the programming of the Superdome lights system. "Every night I drive past it I think how big of a thing it was to be a part of."

In 2012, Solomon Group has contributed more than $230,000 in value of community work for various organizations and events, including the Downtown Development District's Downtown Awards; the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts' Gala 2012; the National World War II Museum's Victory Ball; Halloween in New Orleans, a benefit for Lazarus House; and East Jefferson General Hospital for its Up on the Roof fundraising event.•

— *Tommy Santora*

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Greg Kolenoesky, Lisa Cookmeyer, Michelle Herbert, Sal Mansour, Julie Boese, Regina Cassanova and Corinne Hepting.

Trigon Associates

When Regina Cassanova bought her first home earlier this year, Trigon Associates purchased her a clothes dryer as a reward for outstanding work. When she traveled in July to the company's office in the Middle East, managers suggested she take a week's vacation to explore a different part of the world, so she spent it in Rome.

"I never dreamed Trigon Associates would buy me and my wife a dryer, but we sure appreciated it," said Cassanova, a project manager and civil engineer who has been with the company 18 months. "I also got to visit Europe and the Middle East for the first time, which was very exciting. This year has been wonderful for me personally and professionally."

Trigon Associates is a woman-owned engineering, consulting and management firm that four partners founded in 2009. Its specialty is public works infrastructure such as roads, water systems, sewer and drainage systems.

"I enjoy working for a small firm because I have more control over my work on utility and water projects and I have work-life balance," Cassanova said. "I also like that we all know each other's families and personal lives. Your personal life is respected here and given priority."

Notre Dame civil engineering student Elizabeth Holzenthal works for the firm during summers and holiday breaks. This summer she worked with Trigon on a water treatment plant project and conducted research for the company's overseas ventures.

"This is an all-around great place to work," said Holzenthal, 19. "Everyone is helpful and there's no cattiness or competition. It's supportive and team-oriented and the partners are appreciative of the people who work here. They celebrate birthdays and other occasions, and one time we all went blueberry picking together."

Nature of business: Engineering consulting firm
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 25
Average starting salary: $80,000
Median salary: $90,000
Average time of employment: 3 years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; unmarried partner benefits; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours, employee assistance program
Paid days off: 24 days
Website: www.trigonassociates.com

Trigon Associates provides its 25-member staff with paid health care benefits, a retirement plan and continuing education programs. They also pay membership fees for professional organizations and reward outstanding work with spot bonuses such as cash, gift cards and personal items such as tools or a T-shirt.

To alert staff about spot bonuses, contracts the company has secured, celebrations and happy hours, Trigon President and CEO Lisa Cookmeyer bangs the company gong.

"Engineers tend to be on the serious side, but we like to have fun, so we had a special gong made for the office that we call the Tri-Gong," Cookmeyer said. "It's a welcome addition to our traditions and we all find it funny. We spend a lot of time together here … so we support them in achieving their personal and career goals. It helps make a happier more productive staff."•

— Kerry Duff

Photo by Frank Aymami

From left: Mandy Mire, Sabrina Slavich, Tom Sumner and Erica Plaisance.

THREE-TIME HONOREE

U.S. Risk Management

When Theresa Krueger-Chimento needs to get her tires changed, she can leave work for the afternoon and get it done. Her job as an environmental specialist with U.S. Risk Management offers that kind of flexibility when she isn't busy. Of course, the next week she may have to work 60 to 80 hours in the field doing mold inspections or evaluating air quality, but she doesn't mind because it all balances out.

Krueger-Chimento has been with U.S. Risk Management for five years. Besides the flexible work schedule, she said she enjoys the health benefits and the company's retirement plan. She also enjoys the free parking and pistachios, which are always stocked and available to employees.

"This is not an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. office job, and I like that," Krueger-Chimento said. "The owners expect us to work hard — and we do — but they also try to make our lives better and I appreciate that."

Brandon Peltier, an industrial hygienist technician, said he appreciates that management is in touch with employee needs. After his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer, the company gave him time off to be with her and help her at home.

"Even though we're an emergency response team who can be called out on weekends, the company gives us time off when we need it, not when it's best for them," Peltier said. "They also take care of our needs in the field, like lunch and water, and that makes it easier to save money."

Peltier joined the company almost three years ago. He spends 80 percent of his time in the field conducting water intrusion and lead inspections. He currently is overseeing asbestos removal in 10 buildings at the Port of New Orleans.

"The scope of our work is always changing, so it's interesting and fun," he said. "We have a good team and I feel comfortable working with everyone here. A lot of us even get together outside of work. We go to LSU games and have house parties."

Tracey Dodd and Tom Sumner started U.S. Risk Management in 2003. The company has 37 employees that aid clients in the recognition, evaluation and mitigation of risks to property, personnel and corporate image.

Dodd has been in the field for more than 20 years and said she prides herself on managing the business with an open-door policy. She's also focused on fine-tuning how work is assigned so no one feels overloaded. She also organizes company lunches and events so staff has playtime together.

"We tend to deal with devastation and we see a lot of damage from earthquakes, tornados, flooding and hurricanes," Dodd said. "So at some point we need to step back and take deep breaths. We're smart enough to know that our people and their personal growth is what matters."•

— Kerry Duff

Nature of business: Environmental consulting
Where based: New Orleans
Employees: 37
Average starting salary: $45,000
Median salary: $65,000
Average time of employment: 8+ years
Health care benefits: 100 percent covered; dental, vision and prescription plans
Wait time for benefits: None
Other perks: Continuing education program, relocation assistance, telecommuting, paid mileage, flexible hours
Paid days off: 25 days
Website: www.us-risk.com

Past honorees

Best Places to Work

2011

LARGE COMPANIES
1: Eagan Insurance Agency
2: First NBC Bank
3: Fair Grounds Race Course and Slots
Adams and Reese
Baker Donelson
Booz Allen Hamilton
Bourgeois Bennett
Brown's Dairy
ConocoPhillips Alliance Refinery
Dickie Brennan and Co.
The Domain Cos.
Durr Heavy Construction
1st Lake Properties
Geocent
Harrah's New Orleans
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
HRI Properties
International School of Louisiana
Irwin Fritchie Urquhart and Moore
King Krebs and Jurgens
Kushner LaGraize
Landis Construction
LaPorte Sehrt Romig Hand
North Oaks Health System
Ochsner Health System
Peoples Health
Peter A. Mayer
Phelps Dunbar
Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
Randa Accessories
ReadSoft
The Receivables Exchange
St. Tammany Parish Hospital
Superior Energy Services
Taste Buds Management

SMALL COMPANIES
1: Zehnder Communications
2: Ericksen, Krentel and LaPorte
3: Blitch Knevel Architects
Archon Information Systems
Deveney Communication
Gauthier Houghtaling Williams
Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency
iSeatz
The McDonnel Group
Mouledoux, Bland, Legrand and Brackett
PMOLink
The Rose Garden
Schafer Group
Touch Studios
U.S. Risk Management

2010

LARGE COMPANIES
1. Laitram
2. King, Krebs and Jurgens
3. Geocent
Adams and Reese
Atmos Energy Corp.
Booz Allen Hamilton
Bourgeois Bennett
Brown's Dairy
Dickie Brennan and Co.
Durr Heavy Construction
Eagan Insurance Agency
Eustis Insurance and Benefits
First NBC Bank
Gilsbar
Harrah's Casino New Orleans
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
HRI Properties
Kushner LaGraize
LaPorte Sehrt Romig Hand
Loews New Orleans Hotel
Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Co.
North Oaks Health System
Ochsner Health System
Pan-American Life Insurance Group
Peoples Health
Quest Diagnostics
ReadSoft
Rouses
St. Tammany Parish Hospital
Slidell Memorial Hospital
Strategic Employee Benefit Services of Louisiana
Superior Energy Services
Taste Buds Management
University of Phoenix — Louisiana Campus
West Jefferson Medical Center

SMALL COMPANIES
1. Zehnder Communications
2. PMOLink
3. Ericksen Krentel and LaPorte
Aureus Research Consultants
Bevolo Gas and Electric Lights
Bond Public Relations and Brand Strategy
FH Myers Construction Corp.
Greater New Orleans Federal Credit Union
Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency
Huseman and Associates
Keating Magee
M.S. Rau Antiques
Mudbug Media
Schafer Group
U.S. Risk Management

2009

LARGE COMPANIES
1. Booz Allen Hamilton
2. North Oaks Health System
3. ReadSoft
Adams and Reese
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz
Cox Communications
Durr Heavy Construction
East Jefferson General Hospital
Eagan Insurance Agency
First NBC Bank/Dryades Savings Bank
Geocent
Gilsbar
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
Irwin Fritchie Urquhart & Moore
LaPorte Sehrt Romig Hand
Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Co.
The New Orleans Hornets
Pan American Life Insurance Group
Peoples Health
Peter A. Mayer Advertising Inc.
Phelps Dunbar
Postlethwaite & Netterville
Quest Diagnostics
Randa Accessories
Sizeler Thompson Brown Architects
Slidell Memorial Hospital
Strategic Employee Benefit Services of Louisiana
St. Tammany Parish Hospital
Superior Energy Services
Taste Buds Management
Touro Infirmary
Tulane University
University of Phoenix, Louisiana Campus
Walton Construction Co.
West Jefferson Medical Center

SMALL COMPANIES
1. PMOLink
2. Heller Draper Hayden Patrick & Horn
3. Perez
Deveney Communication
Fleur de Lis Financial/MassMutual
Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams
Hal Collums Construction/Central City Millworks
Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency
Huseman & Associates
Loubat Equipment Co.
PPOplus
The Receivables Exchange
Shell New Orleans Federal Credit Union
United States Risk Management
Zehnder Communications

2008

LARGE COMPANIES
1. Harrah's New Orleans Casino & Hotel
2. North Oaks Health System
3. West Jefferson Medical Center
Adams and Reese
Booz Allen Hamilton
Broadpoint
Coventry Health Care of Louisiana
Cox New Orleans
Deutsch, Kerrigan & Stiles
Diamond Data Systems
Dickie Brennan & Co.
Durr Heavy Construction
Eagan Insurance Agency
East Jefferson General Hospital
Gilsbar
Gregory C. Rigamer & Associates
Hilton New Orleans Riverside
Jones Walker
Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Co.
LaPorte Sehrt Romig Hand
McGlinchey Stafford
Ochsner Health System
Omni Royal Orleans Hotel
Peoples Health
Phelps Dunbar
Planet Beach Franchising
Pool Corp.
The Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
ReadSoft
Slidell Memorial Hospital & Medical Center
St. Tammany Parish Hospital
Superior Energy Services
Touro Infirmary
Tulane University
Walton Construction Co.

SMALL COMPANIES
1. PMOLink
2. Wolfe Law Group
3. Chopin, Wagar, Richard & Kutcher
Creative Engineering Group
Deveney Communication
Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams
Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency
Heller Draper Hayden Patrick & Horn
I-Assure
Loubat Equipment Co.
Louisiana Restaurant Association
Morgan + Company
Rimkus Consulting Group
Schafer Group
Zehnder Communications

2007

LARGE COMPANIES
1. Deutsch, Kerrigan & Stiles
2. ReadSoft
3. Phelps Dunbar
4. Diamond Data Systems
5. Frilot LLC
6. Superior Energy Services
7. Booz Allen Hamilton
8. Adams and Reese
9. Planet Beach Franchising Corp.
10. St. Tammany Parish Hospital
11. DonahueFavret Contractors
12. Coventry Health Care of Louisiana
13. Louisiana Medical Mutual Insurance Co.
14. Broadpoint
15. LaPorte Sehrt Romig Hand
16. Postlethwaite & Netterville
17. Ochsner Health System
18. East Jefferson General Hospital
19. West Jefferson Medical Center
20. Peoples Health
21. Touro Infirmary
22. Walton Construction Co.
23. Tulane Medical Center
24. Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel
25. Durr Heavy Construction
26. John Ehret High School
27. Benjamin Franklin High School
28. Strategic Employee Benefit Services of Louisiana
29. Dickie Brennan and Co.
30. Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
31. Harrah's New Orleans Casino and Hotel
32. McGlinchey Stafford
33. Louisiana Public Health Institute
34. Toyota of New Orleans
35. Stewart Enterprises

SMALL COMPANIES
1. Ellsworth Corp.
2. I-Assure
3. PMOLink
4. Louisiana Restaurant Association
5. Trumpet
6. Morgan + Co.
7. Southern United States Trade Association
8. Deveney Communication
9. Zehnder Communications
10. Riverwalk Marketplace
11. Signature Destination Management
12. Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency
13. Johnson Johnson Barrios & Yacoubian
14. Design the Planet
15. Advanced Imaging Solutions

2006

LARGE BUSINESSES
1. Ochsner Health System
2. Adams and Reese
3. West Jefferson Medical Center
4. Gilsbar Inc.
5. Omni Bank
6. East Jefferson General Hospital
7. St. Tammany Parish Hospital
8. Deutsch Kerrigan & Stiles
9. Touro Infirmary
10. Harrah's Casino and Hotel
11. Booz Allen Hamilton
12. Phelps Dunbar
13. PetroCom
14. Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
15. Peoples Health
16. Dickie Brennan and Company
17. Diamond Data Systems
18. Stone Pigman Walther Wittmann
19. Frilot Partridge
20. Cox Communications
21. Hilton New Orleans Riverside
22. Peter A. Mayer Advertising
23. Superior Energy Services
24. Durr Heavy Construction
25 (tie). Vinson Guard Services
25 (tie). First NBC Bank

SMALL BUSINESSES
1. PMOLink, Inc.
2. Zehnder Communications
3. Ellsworth Corporation
4. Belladonna Day Spa
5. Trumpet Advertising
6. Chopin, Wagar, Richard and Kutcher
7. River Marine Management
8. Keating Magee
9. Deveney Communication
10. Robert Berning Productions
11. Free Gulliver
12. International House Hotel
13. Loubat Equipment
14. Industrial Products Ltd.
15. Aesthetic Surgical Associates

2005

1. Ochsner Clinic Foundation
2. Adams and Reese
3. Kenner Regional Medical Center
4. West Jefferson Medical Center
5. Zehnder Communications
6. East Jefferson General Hospital
7. Albert-Garaudy and Associates
8. Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
9. Omni Bank
10. Deveny Communication
11. Deutsch, Kerrigan and Stiles
12. Hibernia National Bank
13. FARA
14. Apogen Technologies
15. St. Tammany Parish Hospital
16. Keating Magee
17. McGlinchey Stafford
18. River Marine Management
19. Landscape Images
20. Free Gulliver

2004

1. Kenner Regional Medical Center
2. Adams and Reese
3. PMOLink Inc.
4. Zehnder Communications
5. Landscape Images
6. Salco Management
7. West Jefferson Medical Center
8. Harrah's Casino New Orleans
9. Banner Chevrolet
10. PetroCom
11. Gilsbar Inc.
12. Peter A. Mayer Advertising
13. McGlinchey Stafford
14. Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
15. Cannon Cochran Management Services
16. Free Gulliver
17. Stone Pigman Walther Whittmann
18. Edward Jones Investments
19. Correro Fishman Haygood Phelps Walmsley and Casteix
20. Banner Ford

2003

1. Zehnder Communications
2. Ochsner Clinic Foundation
3. Kenner Regional Medical Center
4. Newtown and Associates
5. West Jefferson Medical Center
6. Diamond Data Systems
7. Peter A. Mayer Advertising
8. Harrah's Casino New Orleans
9. Gilsbar Inc.
10. Correro Fishman Haygood Phelps Walmsley and Casteix
11. The Montalbano Group
12. Salco Management
13. PetroCom
14. PMOLink
15. Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group
16. McGlinchey Stafford
17. Franco's Athletic Club
18. American Nursing Services Inc.
19. Ruth's Chris Steak House
20. New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau
21. Vinson Guard Service
22. Lambeth House Continuing Care Retirement Community
23. Harvey Press
24. Omni Bank
25. Hibernia National Bank
26. Natives Landscape Corp.
27. Stone Pigman Walther Whittmann
28. Banner Chevrolet
29. Entergy Corp.
30. Mr. B's Bistro
31. Eustis Engineering Co.
32. Where Y'at Magazine
33. Professional Construction Services
34. The Rose Garden
35. Our Lady of Holy Cross College
36. Pel Hughes Printing
37. Gage Telephone Systems of New Orleans

Best Places to Work: Large companies

(Top three based on judging; rest listed alphabetically)

Name Address	Telephone Fax	Nature of business Website	Average starting salary Median salary	Employment length for benefit eligibility Employees	Health care benefits Dental Vision Prescription Employee recognition program	Paid maternity Daycare options Telecommuting Flexible hours 401(k)	Relocation assistance Job sharing Continuing education Fitness program Subsidized meals
1. Adams and Reese 701 Poydras St., Suite 4500 New Orleans 70139	581-3234 566-0210	law firm www.adamsandreese.com	$38,000 for staff; $100,000 for attorneys $50,000 for staff; $200,000 for attorneys	one month 189 locally 602 firm wide	Y Y N Y N	Y N Y N Y	N N Y Y N
2. First NBC Bank 210 Baronne St. New Orleans 70112	566-8000 671-3484	banking www.firstnbcbank.com	$50,184 $41,700	first of the month after 30 days 409	NA Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y N Y
3. Landis Construction 8300 Earhart Blvd., Suite 300 New Orleans 70118	833-6070 833-6662	construction www.landisllc.com	$37,500 for hourly; $45,000 for salaried $42,000 for hourly; $55,000 for salaried	none 90	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N Y Y	N N Y Y N
Audubon Engineering Co. 111 Veterans Blvd. Suite 1200 Metairie 70005	833-5669 910-5424	engineering firm www.audubon-engineering.com	$72,611 staff; $102,074 engineers $70,000 staff; $104,000 engineers	first of the month after hire 769	Y Y Y Y Y	NA Y N N NA	N N N N N
Baker Donelson 201 St. Charles Ave., Suite 3600 New Orleans 70170	566-5200 636-4000	law firm www.bakerdonelson.com	$54,163 for staff; $153,740 for attorneys $54,900 for staff; $178,750 for attorneys	first of the month after 30 days 98 locally 1,230 firmwide	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y N N
Booz Allen Hamilton 201 St. Charles Ave., Suite 2500 New Orleans 70170	330-5494 524-7979	consulting www.boozallen.com	$70,000 $91,000	none 24 locally 24,000 companywide	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y N
DCL Mooring & Rigging 4400 N. Galvez St. New Orleans 70117	994-3366 941-4190	industrial www.dcl-usa.com	$24,960 staff; $31,200 management $39,520 staff; $45,760 management	30 days after hire 54	Y Y N Y Y	N N N N Y	N N Y N N
Dickie Brennan and Co. 605 Canal St. New Orleans 70130	521-8313 523-1633	dining www.frenchquarter-dining.com	$26,000 for hourly; $42,000 for management $30,000 for hourly; $50,000 for management	six months for hourly; three month for salaried 400	Y Y Y Y Y	N N N Y Y	N N Y Y Y
Durr Heavy Construction 817 Hickory Ave. Harahan 70123	737-3205 737-3905	construction www.durrhc.com	$32,700 for laborers; $60,500 for management $43,100 for laborers; $69,000 for management	30 days for health care; 90 days for sick times; 1 year for 401(k) 135	Y Y Y Y Y	N Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
Eagan Insurance Agency 2629 N. Causeway Blvd. Metairie 70002	836-9600 836-9621	insurance www.eaganins.com	$45,000 for staff; $145,000 for producers $49,000 for staff; $175,000 for producers	30 days 76	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	N N Y Y N
Fair Grounds Race Course and Slots 1751 Gentilly Blvd. New Orleans 70119	944-5515 948-1261	horse racing and casino www.fairgroundsracecourse.com	$11 per hour $16 per hour	first of the month after 30 425	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y N Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
First Lake Properties 4971 W. Napoleon Ave. Metairie 70001	455-5059 455-8764	property management www.1stlake.com	$13 per hour; $37,000 for salaried $13 per hour; $40,865 for salaried	first of the month after 90 days NA	Y Y Y Y Y	NA N N N Y	N N N Y N
Geocent 111 Veterans Blvd., Suite 1600 Metairie 70005	831-1900 831-1901	information technology www.geocent.com	$79,134 $83,852	none 201	Y Y Y Y Y	NA N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
Harrah's Casino New Orleans 8 Canal Place New Orleans 70130	533-6000 (702) 892-2709	gaming www.harrahsneworleans.com	$9.19 per hour; $58,614.17 for salaried $10 per hour; $50,799.38 for salaried	none 1,603 locally 70,000 companywide	Y Y Y Y Y	N Y N Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
Hilton New Orleans Riverside 2 Poydras St. New Orleans 70130	561-0500 584-3861	hotel www.neworleans.hilton.com	$11.55 per hour; $36,750 for salaried $15.60 per hour; $47,250 for salaried	none 750 locally 130,000 companywide	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y

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Best Places to Work: Large companies

(Top three based on judging; rest listed alphabetically)

Name Address	Telephone Fax	Nature of business Website	Average starting salary Median salary	Employment length for benefit eligibility Employees	Health care benefits Dental Vision Prescription Employee recognition program	Paid maternity Daycare options Telecommuting Flexible hours 401(k)	Relocation assistance Job sharing Continuing education Fitness program Subsidized meals
HRI Properties 909 Poydras St., Suite 3100 New Orleans 70112	566-0204 525-3932	real estate www.hriproperties.com	$26,874 for hourly, $52,450 for salaried $28,257 for hourly, $72,910 for salaried	30 or 90 days depending on division 306	NA Y Y Y Y	NA N Y Y Y	Y N N Y N
Hyatt Regency New Orleans 601 Loyola Ave. New Orleans 70113	561-1234 613-3810	hotel www.neworleans.hyatt.com	$12.09 per hour; $62,511.10 salaried $12 per hour; $54,800 salaried	90 days after hire 433 locally 130,000 companywide	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
iSeatz Inc. 643 Magazine St., Suite 100 New Orleans 70130	586-1234 554-7642	software development www.iseatz.com	$63,124 $74,073	none 68	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y N Y	N N Y Y N
Kean Miller LLP 909 Poydras St. Suite 1400 New Orleans 70112	585-3050 585-3051	law firm www.keanmiller.com	$44,850 staff; $95,000 attorney $47,325 staff; $104,143 attorney	none 48 locally 268 companywide	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N Y Y	Y N Y N N
LAMMICO 1 Galleria Blvd., Suite 700 Metairie 70001	831-3756 841-5301	insurance www.lammico.com	$66,080 for staff; $172,894 for consultants $65,184 for staff; $157,689 for consultants	first of the month after 30 days 115	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y N
LaPorte CPAs and Business Advisors 111 Veterans Blvd., Suite 600 Metairie 70005	835-5522 835-5535	accounting www.laporte.com	$35,900 for administrative; $50,000 for accountants $38,890 for administrative; $69,800 for accountants	none 156	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
North Oaks Health System P.O. Box 2668 Hammond 70404	(985) 345-2700 (985) 230-1038	health care www.northoaks.org	$57,179 $48,984	none 2,482	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
Ochsner Health System 1514 Jefferson Highway Jefferson 70121	842-9114 842-4058	health care www.ochsner.org	$49,341 $45,760	first of the month after 30 days 10,876	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
Peter A. Mayer Advertising Agency 324 Camp St. New Orleans 70130	581-7191 671-8262	advertising www.peteramayer.com	$53,600 for nonexecutive management; $200,000 for executive management $42,500 for nonexecutive management; $200,000 for executive management	none 168	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y N N
Phelps Dunbar 365 Canal St., Suite 2000 New Orleans 70130	566-1311 568-9130	law firm www.phelpsdunbar.com	$42,800 for staff; $98,000 for attorneys $53,580 for staff	first of the month after one full month 202 locally 535 firmwide	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y N
Phillips 66 Alliance Refinery 15551 Highway 23 Belle Chasse 70037	656-7711 656-3000	refining www.phillips66.com	$52,707 hourly; $79,644 salaried $55,342 hourly; $84,000 salaried	none 420	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N N Y	Y N Y Y N
Point Eight Power 1510 Engineers Road Belle Chasse 70037	(800) 284-1522 (850) 394-6686	consulting www.pointeightpower.com	$11.61 per hour; $46,427 salaried $15 per hour; $60,190 salaried	30 days after hire 150	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N N Y	Y N N Y Y
Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group 550 Bienville St. New Orleans 70130	539-5515 539-5538	dining www.neworleans-food.com	$56,000 for management; $14 per hour $50,000; $12.92 per hour	three months after hire 272	Y Y Y Y Y	NA N N Y Y	N N N Y Y
ReadSoft 3838 N. Causeway Blvd., Suite 2400 Metairie 70002	841-0100 841-0144	software development www.readsoft.com	$60,000 $95,000	30 days after hire 82 locally 625 companywide	Y Y N Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y N

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Best Places to Work: Large companies

(Top three based on judging; rest listed alphabetically)

Name Address	Telephone Fax	Nature of business Website	Average starting salary Median salary	Employment length for benefit eligibility Employees	Health care benefits Dental Vision Prescription Employee recognition program	Paid maternity Daycare options Telecommuting Flexible hours 401(k)	Relocation assistance Job sharing Continuing education Fitness program Subsidized meals
Slidell Memorial Hospital 1001 Gause Blvd. Slidell 70458	(985) 643-2200 (985) 649-8778	health care www.slidellmemorial.org	$15 per hour for staff; $125.50 per hour for doctors $23.59 per hour for staff; $125.50 per hour for doctors	first of the month after hire 882	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
St. Tammany Parish Hospital 1202 S. Tyler St. Covington 70433	(985) 898-4000 (985) 898-4394	health care www.stph.org	$59,229 $62,192	none 1347	Y Y N Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
Stress Engineering Services Inc. 3314 Richland Ave. Metairie 70002	889-8440 889-8441	consulting www.stress.com	$44,448 technicians; $90,000 engineers $41,520 technicians; $89,2880 engineers	none 328	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N Y Y	Y Y Y Y Y
Superior Energy Services 600 Poydras St., Suite 2400 New Orleans 70130	587-7374 362-5558	oilfield services www.superiorenergy.com	$58,500 $44,200	none 516	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y N Y	Y N Y N N
TurboSquid 935 Gravier St., Suite 1600 New Orleans 70112	525-0990 (205) 278-8506	3D online marketing www.turbosquid.com	$54,587 $38,000	90 days after hire 58	Y Y Y N Y	Y N Y Y Y	N N N Y N
Zehnder Communications Inc. 650 Poydras St., Suite 2450 New Orleans 70130	558-7778 558-7779	marketing www.z-comm.com	$43,750 $55,750	90 days after hire 65	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y	Y N Y N N

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Fax (504) 832-3534 • email: jaclyn.meith@nopg.com

Best Places to Work: Small companies

(Top three based on judging; rest listed alphabetically)

Name Address	Telephone Fax	Nature of business Website	Average starting salary Median salary	Employment length for benefit eligibility Employees	Health care benefits Dental Vision Prescription Employee recognition program	Paid maternity Daycare options Telecommuting Flexible hours 401(k)	Relocation assistance Job sharing Continuing education Fitness program Subsidized meals
1. Ericksen Krentel and LaPorte 4227 Canal St. New Orleans 70119	486-7275 482-2516	accounting www.ericksenkrentel.com	$25,000 for staff; $45,000 for accountants $37,000 for staff; $60,000 for accountants	none 34	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
2. Gillis, Ellis & Baker Inc. 1615 Poydras St. New Orleans 70112	581-3334 587-0766	insurance www.gillis.com	$30,000 for staff; $40,000 for management $60,000 for staff; $150,000 for management	none 47	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N N Y	N N Y Y N
3. Blitch Knevel Architiects 757 St. Charles Ave. New Orleans 70130	524-4634 524-5128	architecture www.blitchknevel.com	$45,000 $96,000	first of the month after hire 22	Y Y Y Y Y	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y Y Y
3. Deveney Communication 2406 Chartres St. New Orleans 70117	949-3999 949-3974	communications www.deveney.com	$46,000 $75,000	none 14	Y Y Y Y N	N N N N N	N N Y Y N
Archon Information Systems 935 Gravier St., Suite 1700 New Orleans 70112	267-0065 267-0067	software development www.archoninfosys.com	$25,360 for hourly; $55,395 for salaried $27,040 for hourly; $76,040 for salaried	30 days 46	Y Y Y Y Y	N/A N N Y Y	Y N Y Y N
Greater New OIreans Inc. 365 Canal St., Suite 2300 New Orleans 70130	527-6900 527-6970	economic development www.gnoinc.org	$72,000 $79,000	30 days after first month of employment 20	Y Y Y Y Y	N N N N Y	Y N Y N N
Hartwig Moss Insurance Agency 2626 Canal St. New Orleans 70119	569-9909 569-9900	insurance www.hmia.com	$44,967 for staff; $131,524 for agents $44,995 for staff; $104,130 for agents	first of the month after hire 42	Y Y Y N Y	Y N N Y Y	N Y Y N N
Infinity Engineering Consultants 2626 Canal St. New Orleans 70119	304-0548 355-0265	consulting/engineering www.infinityec.com	$33,280 $100,000	none 21	Y Y Y Y Y	N N N Y Y	Y N Y Y N
Kushner LaGraize 3330 W. Esplanade Ave., Suite 100 New Orleans 70002	838-9991 833-7971	accounting www.kl-cpa.com	$45,000 $57,500	first of the month after 30 days 49	Y Y Y Y N	N N N Y Y	N N Y N N
M.S. Rau Antiques 630 Royal St. New Orleans 70130	523-5660 566-0057	antique retailer www.rauantiques.com	$31,000 $60,000	90 days 35	Y Y Y Y Y	Y N N Y Y	Y N Y Y N
Pullen Air Conditioning Inc. 377 Brooklyn Ave. New Orleans 70121	833-1106 265-9336	air conditioning & heating www.pullnac.com	$33,500 $38,000	6 months after hire 12	N/A N/A N/A N/A N	Y N N Y Y	N Y Y N N
Ryan Gootee General Contractors 1110 Ridgewood Drive Metairie 70001	832-1282 832-8969	construction www.rggc.com	$40,000 for staff; $52,000 for management $48,000 for staff; $62,000 for management	90 days 31	Y N/A N/A Y Y	N N N Y Y	N N Y N N/A
Solomon Group Productions 900 S. Peters St., C-1 New Orleans 70130	584-4500 584-4094	production and design www.solomongroup.com	$35,000 $55,000	none 24	Y Y Y Y N	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y N N
Trigon Associates 1515 Poydras St., Suite 2200 New Orleans 70112	585-5767 585-5747	consulting www.trigonassociates.com	$35,000 for staff; $80,000 for engineers $38,000 for staff; $90,000 for engineers	none 25	Y Y Y Y N	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y N N
U.S. Risk Management 365 Canal St., Suite 2760 New Orleans 70130	561-6563 561-6624	environmental consulting www.us-risk.com	$40,000 $55,000	none 37	Y Y Y Y N	N N Y Y Y	Y N Y N N

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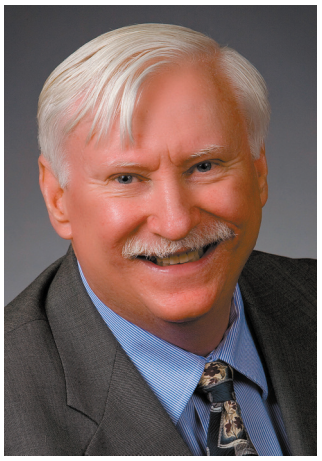
First NBC

Chosen FIVE times as one of the

New Orleans CITY BUSINESS Best Places to Work



Ashton J. Ryan, Jr.
President & CEO
First NBC Bank

First NBC Bank recognizes that a community based financial institution grows when it has professional and caring employees. We strive every day to supply the best banking services to each of our customers.

First NBC Bank is now a 31 location full-service financial institution. Majority local ownership, allows us to cut through red tape and make decisions quickly when responding to our customers' financial needs. Our entire staff is committed to a relationship-based community bank structure unlike any other found in today's crowded banking environment.

The Bank's flexible organizational structure affords our clients access to highly skilled and empowered bankers who are valued as trusted financial partners. And because we believe in open communication with customers, we will always encourage you to discuss your financial objectives and look for ways to implement them.

First NBC Bank never stopped lending even during days of market instability.

We're recognized as one of the top lending and service related banks throughout the Crescent City and the Metropolitan Area.

So, if you want to work with a bank that makes client services its primary concern, you know who you can turn to.

Serving customers on the South and North Shores

31 First NBC Locations

Orleans Parish

Main Office
210 Baronne Street
504-566-8000

Mid City Office
504-252-4345

St. Charles Office
504-252-4330

Read Office
504-671-3875

Carondelet Office
504-671-3560

DeGaulle Office
504-252-4300

Lakeview Office
504-671-3520

Jefferson Parish

Elmwood Office
504-671-3510

Kenner Office
504-671-3540

Lapalco Office
504-671-3570

Veterans Office
504-671-3530

Transcontinental Office
504-671-3425

Terrytown Office
504-671-3550

Manhattan Office
504-252-4315

Cleary Office
504-252-4360

St. Tammany Parish

Pontchartrain Office
985-819-1240

Covington Office
985-234-2265

Mandeville Office
985-626-4488

Madisonville Office
985-819-1310

Pearl River Office
985-819-1385

Lacombe Office
985-819-1200

Gause West Office
985-649-3535

Gause Central Office
985-265-1000

Gause East Office
985-781-2265

Brownswitch Road Office
985-768-4560

Tangipahoa Parish

Amite Office
985-819-1345

Southwest Railroad Office
985-819-1330

Ponchatoula Office
985-819-1360

Kentwood Office
985-819-1450

Washington Parish

Bogalusa Office
985-819-1320

Livingston Parish

Denham Springs Office
225-706-1357

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Member FDIC

First NBC Bank is a SBA preferred lender.