

After five years, Best Places measures its goals

Five years ago, the *Phoenix Business Journal* and BestCompaniesAZ (formerly The Gredler Group) came together with a common vision to recognize the most outstanding places of employment in the Valley for the benefit of the local economy, business and work force.

Today, as we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Best Places to Work program, it's a perfect time to look back and see just how well we've measured up to our initial goals.

• **Goal: to generate and publish a highly credible list of the Valley's best places to work, as determined by actual employee survey results, and to increase company participation year after year.**

The 2003 roster of Best Places to Work in the Valley included 20 prestigious companies whose employees rated them well in a voluntary survey.

This year, 90 outstanding employers from just about every industry represented in Arizona are being honored as the best of the best. An additional 34 companies garnered honorable mentions, a new category of recognition this year.

As in years past, the majority of the businesses participating in the program fell into the small-business category (fewer than 100 employees). Record participation this year made it difficult for the *Business Journal* to limit that category's list to 30 companies. Therefore, companies that achieved an overall favorable survey rating (composite score of 90 percent or higher) received honorable mentions.

Congratulations to all 64 of the small companies recognized.

• **Goal: to foster a competitive spirit among Valley businesses for improving workplaces in the Valley.**

Over the past five years, hundreds of companies have recognized the importance of being honored as one of the Best Places to Work in the Valley. Those who have made the list, including four companies that are five-time winners, have reaped benefits ranging from increased employee retention and higher employee satisfaction ratings, to greater degrees



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of autonomy and innovative thinking among staff and management.

We're also proud that this year's five-time winners have received numerous national awards.

Edward Jones landed once again on *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work for in America" list and received *BusinessWeek*'s "Customer Service Champs" award in March. St. Joseph's Hospital & Medical Center recently was honored as a "Solucient 100 Top Hospital," and *US News & World Report* lists it among "America's Best Hospitals." And Troon Golf and State Mortgage continue to receive many industry awards.

The public relations buzz associated with all these awards has raised awareness that there is a strong correlation between the Best Places rankings and other service accolades, and the result has been a significant increase in competition within industries to be included in the program.

Not only are more companies competing, but we've also seen more and more industries getting on board. For example, only one law firm was represented in the program's inaugural year; today, six are on the list.

In 2003, there were only two hospitals on the large employers list; this year, there are triple that number.

We're also excited to announce the first school, Patterson Elementary School in Gilbert, and the first professional sports team, the Arizona Diamondbacks, to be honored as winners this year. The competition continues across all industries, resulting in an impressive 40 percent increase in overall applications this year.

• **Goal: to obtain information about metro Phoenix businesses that will**

raise workplace standards throughout the Valley by benchmarking workplace performance now and into the future.

Every company that participates in the Best Places to Work program receives complete survey results so they can compare trends from year to year and focus on making needed improvements.

For example, St. Joseph's Hospital, a five-time honoree, used its survey results to analyze trends against turnover statistics, as well as to gauge patient satisfaction. BestCompanies also runs a benchmarking study every other year, has organized two best-practice forums and routinely is invited to address local universities, career management firms, associations and other businesses on how to build a best place to work.

• **Goal: to promote the Phoenix area's best employment opportunities on an exclusive Web site that assists winners in attracting high-quality job candidates.**

It goes without saying that job seekers are getting more selective. Fortunately, the majority of the honorees have experienced an increase in both in- and out-of-state job applicants, thanks to their Best Places status. Every honoree has the opportunity to be showcased on www.bestcompaniesaz.com. With statistics that climb every month, the site provides a unique forum for winners to promote their businesses.

The results are quality leads for both passive and active job seekers. The site is ranked No. 1 on both Google and Yahoo for "best places" searches, which means greater exposure for businesses to potential employees and future customers.

• **Goal: to help Valley employers retain a talented work force.**

Best Places to Work companies also excel in employee retention. The Valley's current voluntary turnover rate is approximately 14 percent, roughly on par

with the *Fortune* Best Companies average of 12 percent.

St. Joseph's Hospital has experienced a 4 percent reduction in employee turnover, which is significant in that industry. Furthermore, the hospital's internal and external survey results show a direct correlation between increased employee satisfaction and increased patient satisfaction ratings.

As we celebrate five incredible years of growth and development in the program, I would like to extend my gratitude to all those who supported our initial vision in 2003 — your foresight and unwavering support have been invaluable.

• Great Place to Work Institute, 2003 survey and research partner

• Trish Bear and Gil Rodriquez, Web partners

• Amy Lieberman, Rick Lieberman and Jack Fields, 2003 advisory board

• Valley of the Sun Human Resource Association

• Arizona Society for Human Resource Management Council

• All the 2003 inaugural sponsors and supporting associations

As we enter into a new year, BestCompaniesAZ will strengthen our focus on key industries that are experiencing employee shortages, such as health care and education.

Our goal will be to help best companies in those industries capitalize on their Best Places status by attracting quality

workers to Arizona.

By boosting our Web site and association exposure throughout the country, we will make sure job seekers nationwide know what we already know: that Arizona truly is a great place to work and live.

Denise Gredler is founder and president of BestCompaniesAZ LLC, a human resources consulting firm, and founding partner of the Best Places to Work in the Valley program. More information can be found at www.bestcompaniesaz.com.

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