

Savoring Success

Former Top Companies Reflect on Wins

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Five! Four! Three! Two! One! That's the crowd of nearly 900 people gathered for the annual Best Places to Work in Indiana awards celebration enthusiastically counting down to the top spot when the state's premier employers are revealed. But what happens after the big announcement – when the winners collect their trophies and the night comes to an end?

Just ask these companies.

Honorees in 2012 that previously topped either the small/medium or large lists include three-time No. 1 Edward Jones (2006, 2007 and 2008), Shiel Sexton (2009), Centier Bank (2010), Software Engineering Professionals (SEP) in 2010 and E-gineering (2011).

Employees at each share what the award meant to their businesses – and its lasting impact.

Spreading the word

All aboard the Centier Bank “Rally Bus!”

President and CEO Mike Schrage embarked on a three-day “tour” of Northwest Indiana to personally congratulate (and surprise) the bank's 600-plus associates. Headquartered in Merrillville, Centier had more than 40 regional branches at the time.

“We went around to all of our branches and we got the big No. 1 hands and pennants and noisemakers, so it was like a sports team going around on a tour. We went to every single location,” recalls vice president of human resources Chrisanne Christ. “We also had an ice cream truck following us, so everyone

got to pick whatever ice cream they wanted.

“They (employees) were just going crazy. They had fun with it. It was important for Mike to hit every location because we all celebrated that win.”

In addition, Centier treated its associates to a day off by closing all of its branches that year on Columbus Day.

Employees at Carmel-based SEP also enjoyed getting the word out about their victory.

“We did a huge amount of promotion of the award: LinkedIn, our web site, Twitter, marketing literature, business development, recruiting,” president Jeff Gilbert comments. “We put together our own press releases. But I'll tell you, it was our first year in the program. We were quite frankly so shocked that it kind of caught us off guard.”

Software consulting firm E-gineering, located in Indianapolis, touted its honor in a variety of ways as well.

“We were able to sort of bring attention to (the award) on our web site and in our e-mail signatures that not only are we on the Best Places list, but we were voted No. 1,” shares director of business services Nick Taylor. “It lets us talk to people we normally wouldn't talk to and share our story.

“Internally, not a whole lot changed. Just being so thankful for our employees and saying, ‘Let's not only keep up the good work, but there are eyes on us (with the recognition) and let's excel even more.’”

Troy Lingley, a financial advisor and regional leader at Edward Jones, works out of the firm's three-person operation

A healthy work-life balance and company pride take center stage at each former No.1 organization (from left: Edward Jones, E-gineering, SEP, Shiel Sexton and Centier Bank).



in Brownsburg. The financial services giant is the nation's largest in terms of branch offices.

"It's an honor that, largely, the feedback (comes from) our associates," he observes. "I think it's pretty valuable, and that reassures our clients and kind of validates their smart decision to choose to work with us. They know we're not only good to them, but also to the people who work for the firm."

Attracting – and keeping – the best

Honorees contend that their award-winning status significantly impacts recruitment and retention efforts.

"To claim the top spot, that is huge," Gilbert declares. "We hire high-tech grads, and we have the brain drain we talk about. For them to know there's a top company in the state at least gives them some pause to stop and look at Indiana (instead of) immediately (assuming) they have to go to one of the coasts.

"We've been able to hire the people we want to hire, even in this competitive market. I have to think this award has something to do with that."

Mike Dilts, president and CEO of construction management company Shiel Sexton, says that when it comes to potential clients, the No. 1 ranking "definitely gets their attention.

"We use this as a part of our dialogue in our recruiting efforts," he notes. "We tell them about the competition and say, 'Look, these are companies (applying for the Best Places designation) from all walks of life and this is what we're up against.'

"There's never one thing that gets you the job or the employee you're pursuing really hard, but it's the combination. We definitely use it, and I think it does make a difference."

Lingley of Edward Jones stresses, "I don't think there's any doubt that it's had a positive influence on both (recruiting and retention). It's an excellent tool for recruiting. Who wouldn't want, in considering a career or firm to work for, to consider the firm that's ranked No. 1 in the state?"

E-gineering's Taylor adds, "We get two or three resumés a week that say, '(I'm) looking for work, and I saw you were on the Best Places to Work list. I checked out your web site and want (to learn more about your company).'"

Christ credits the No. 1 distinction for Centier with reinforcing associates' loyalty.

"The reasons we made (it to) No. 1 were the reasons we had associates stay," she asserts. "We made a decision not to lay off any employees during a time that was very volatile and they knew that Mike, our president, was a man of his word.

"That security of knowing, 'I can trust him, and I'm not going to lose my job' (meant a lot to staff). Our turnover is lower than ever this year – 7% – and in banking, that's really good. Competitors are maybe 12% to 13%."

Part of a team

One of the most valuable benefits the Best Places to Work title brings is a boost to employee morale.

"We had fun with it," Taylor remarks. "We continue to have fun with it. It gives us something collective to talk about. That helps morale and it gives us more motivation to say, 'How can we stay there?'"

"We're extremely proud. We're just so thankful that the list exists. It gives us one big thing to set us apart. It's a competitive world out there ..."

Christ agrees.

"It's not the journey of getting there and we're done," she emphasizes. "It's, 'How do we live up to those expectations now? Can we ever get up to No. 1 (again)?'"

Shiel Sexton's Dilts says the recognition represents a team win.

"It's really about our company and how people enjoy coming here every day. We have worked very hard to create that (atmosphere). Everyone can take pride in this.

"Everyone wants to be aligned with a winner," he declares. "It's a huge deal."

