

The Chocolate Nazi
by Martha Bergland

A Swindler
Unmasked
by Cheryl L. Collins

Marquette's
Unholy Art Snub
by Debra Brehmer



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Milwaukee

MAGAZINE

BEST PLACES TO WORK

37
TOP
COMPANIES

How does your job rate?



plus

Spring fashion
Condo failure
Predicting the future



STARK INVESTMENTS
Corporate headquarters on
Milwaukee's lakefront.

Best Places to Work

Teresa DeLuca had an idea.

As a brand new employee in the information technology department at Milwaukee's Derco Aerospace, DeLuca went to her bosses to suggest they start using a software package that she liked at her previous job. They listened. And then they gave her the green light.

It was an unfamiliar outcome. "At my previous company, the executives didn't really care," says the 35-year-old DeLuca, who joined Derco, a distributor of aircraft parts on the far northwest side, less than six months ago.

For her, experiences like that have made Derco an unparalleled employer. "The executive team is involved in the day-to-day activities," DeLuca says. "If I ever had ideas, they've always been more than willing to listen to them. It makes me work that much better. If they're willing to listen to new ideas, I'm more willing to go out of my way and make an extra effort to look for new solutions for them.

"It's the best place I've ever worked."

She's not alone – and Derco isn't, either. Its policies and rave reviews from employees helped the company land solidly on the list of 14 top-rated, medium-sized employers.

Derco is just one of the 30-plus small, medium and large employers to make the grade as Best Places to Work after an in-depth survey conducted for us by MRA-The Management Association, *Milwaukee Magazine's* partner in this project.

"The employee of today wants to be part of something special," says MRA President Susan Fronk. "They want to know their place in their company's future. Moreover, they want to learn and grow. It's not just about skills training. They want to be challenged and stimulated. And in return for that vivid picture of where they fit in the future, they'll try their best to get there."

For employers who want those high-energy employees, this year's Best Places survey can offer a road map. But it offers something else as well: an affirmation that there can be many paths to excellence.

What makes an employer one of the Best Places to Work in the Milwaukee area? A combination of features, to be sure – good pay, valued benefits, low turnover, satisfied employees. The 33 companies featured on our chart on page 60 all fill the bill.

But for this year's look at Best Places to Work – our first after

We know – work can get in the way of life sometimes. But these local companies offer more than just a 9-to-5. And in return they get hard work and loyalty from their employees.

by Erik Gunn

a three-year hiatus – *Milwaukee Magazine* and MRA also considered three specific areas in which some employers particularly excelled. So besides the overall best places, *Milwaukee Magazine* and MRA identified top-performing employers within specific categories: 10 for training, 10 for employee engagement, and eight for responding to the multigenerational workforce. The honorees included four companies outside of the 33 on our chart.

What that separate survey underscores is that there isn't just one kind of "Best Place to Work."

A number of companies – but not all – wound up on both the overall list and in the top ranks of our three special categories. Some companies only scored on the overall list and opted not to seek recognition for any of the subcategories, which required a supplementary application. Others tried, but fell short. And still others didn't quite make it into the top ranks of employers overall, but saw their stars shine when it came to particular practices.

"It's quite possible for a company to be really great in one area," says Bonni Yordi, MRA's research director. At the same time, with the stiff competition for the overall kudos, there are only so many trophies to go around.

For employers who fell short of what it took to make the overall list, Yordi emphasizes, "it didn't mean these companies were not good. It's the difference between good and great."

These are challenging times for workers and employers alike. Economic anxiety, a tightening job market and rising insecurity make almost any job seem better than the alternative. Yet employers look around and see their own cause for concern. There is, more than one executive told us, a "war for talent" in the labor market, and companies that want to thrive these days know the best way to win that war is to make sure talent sticks around.

Their strategies can vary considerably, however. And that's why we thought it would be particularly revealing to look at the three subcategories: multigenerational, training and engagement.

As demographic shifts take on seismic proportions – Baby Boomers hitting retirement age, Gen Xers moving into midlife, Millennials overturning conventional expectations as they enter the job market – we wanted to know which employers were the smartest and most successful in dealing with people at points all

500 or more employees
Large-sized Companies

Final Rank	Company	No. of Employees (Milwaukee area only)	Location	Profile
1	Johnson Financial Group	741	Racine	Financial services and banking company serving consumers and business
2	Medical Associates Health Centers	844	Menomonee Falls, Hartford, Sussex, Germantown, Waukesha	Independent, physician-owned, multispecialty medical group practice
3	Children's Hospital and Health System	3580	Wauwatosa	Inpatient and outpatient health care focused exclusively on children
4	Robert W. Baird & Co.	1049	Milwaukee	Wealth management, capital markets and asset management firm
5	Assurant Health	1774	Milwaukee	Provider of individual, short-term and small-group health insurance products; one of four operating units of New York-based Assurant Inc.
6	Marquette University	2250	Milwaukee	Private, Catholic college offering bachelor's and graduate degrees
7	Froedtert & Community Health	6000	Wauwatosa	Academic medical center, hospital and clinics
8	Marshall & Ilsley Corporation	7403	Milwaukee	Financial services and banking company
9	Brady Corporation	978	Milwaukee	Manufacturer of signs, labels and other products used to identify products, premises and people

101 to 499 employees
Medium-sized Companies

1	Mortenson Construction	120	Brookfield	Provider of comprehensive construction management services; one of 10 nationwide offices of Minneapolis-based firm
2	Clifton Gunderson LLP	124	Wauwatosa	Certified public accountants and consultants to business and industry; the parent firm, based in Peoria, Ill., has offices in 17 states and D.C.
3	QPS Companies, Inc.	116	Milwaukee	Staffing company providing temporary job placement for professional, technical, industrial and office employees
4	Paragon Development Systems, Inc.	136	Oconomowoc	Information technology design, implementation and consultation
5	InPro Corporation	353	Muskego	Manufacturer of interior and exterior architectural products
6	Kahler Slater	104	Milwaukee	Provider of master planning, architecture, interior and graphic design, facilities management and communications services
7	Derco Aerospace, Inc.	295	Milwaukee	Provides aircraft parts, repairs and other solutions to civilian and military customers; unit of Sikorsky Aircraft, owned by United Technologies
8	Orthopaedic Hospital of Wisconsin	120	Glendale	Focuses on diagnosis and treatment of orthopedic injuries
9	CG Schmidt	360	Milwaukee	Construction management and general contracting firm
10	Eppstein Uhen Architects	140	Milwaukee	Architectural design and services firm
11	R.A. Smith & Associates, Inc.	214	Brookfield	Civil engineering and surveying firm
12	von Briesen & Roper, s.c.	185	Milwaukee	Law firm serving individuals and corporate clients in several areas
13	Stark Investments	334	Milwaukee	Global alternative investment firm serving institutions, investment funds, family offices and high net worth individuals
13	Ruekert & Mielke, Inc.	136	Waukesha	Engineering and land surveying firm serving municipal customers

100 or fewer employees
Small-sized Companies

1	Chamness Group	7	Milwaukee	Consultant to companies and nonprofits in marketing, sales and planning.
2	The PrivateBank N.A.	18	Milwaukee	Provides premium financial services to businesses and affluent individuals; autonomous Wis. unit of Chicago-based Private Bankcorp Inc.
3	Tailored Label Products	53	Menomonee Falls	Precision maker of labels, die cut adhesive components and wrist bands
4	Centare Group, Ltd.	35	Brookfield	Developer and provider of software applications, system integration and business intelligence services
5	Layton State Bank	38	Milwaukee	Financial services institution serving individual and business customers
6	Jewish Family Services	96	Milwaukee	Nonprofit provider of services for older adults, mental health, exceptional needs and community education
7	Batzner Pest Management, Inc.	72	New Berlin	Rodent and pest control service
8	Continental Properties Company, Inc.	83	Menomonee Falls	National commercial, residential and hotel real estate development
9	Mortgagebot LLC	77	Mequon	Provider of Internet solutions for mortgage lenders
10	The Benefit Services Group, Inc.	52	Pewaukee	Provides employers with benefit plan services including analysis, consultation and administration



DELOITTE & TOUCHE
The Downtown accounting firm scored high for its training programs.

along their personal career timelines. Where were the best places to start your career? Who knows how to keep pace with you as you progress through the various stages of your life? And who best supports more senior workers, those long on knowledge and perhaps ready to downshift, but who don't want to leave the working world?

With the fast pace of change turning every job into a potential stepping stone to the next one – the notion of staying put at one employer for life is somewhat antiquated – training has never been more important. So we also wanted to know which employers valued and supported lifelong learning among the people who worked for them.

And because the happiest workers seem to be those whose jobs seem to satisfy a hunger to make a difference – the ones who don't have to check their brains or their consciences at the door – we took aim at yet another special category: Which employers appeared to be most effective in engaging their workforces day in and day out?

In the end, there's a common thread that runs through all of these attributes – and one that is also present in the broader list of employers. It's a thread we found by asking the people who know best about these workplaces – the people who work there.

More than in any previous Best Places article, this year's MRA/*Milwaukee Magazine* survey made employees themselves the final arbiters. In the past, employee opinions were mainly taken from companies that had already qualified, based on company practices, as likely final candidates for our lists. In that way, worker surveys could be used mainly to affirm or (rarely) veto a company's selection. This time around, though, MRA surveyed many more employees – more than 4,000 of them – working for many more companies, and their say was given more weight than ever before.

When Yordi looked over the data that resulted, she found four things in common among employers who scored highest with employees:

- They offered more opportunities for employees to boost their skills.
- Their employees were more interested in the future of the company and more committed to its long-term success.
- Their employees were more likely to closely identify with the values of the employer, compared with those who work for the also-rans.

Partnership was seen as a two-way street. Employers showed greater support for their employees' need for work/life balance and greater flexibility when dealing with employees' personal and family matters. The payback: employees who are willing to bend their schedules when crunch time at work demands it.

In short, as workers, we don't just want to punch a clock and keep our distance. We want more. We want a relationship with the place where we spend one-third of our day and half our waking hours. At the Best Places to Work, people report they find just that.

"The concept of relationship is important," says Yordi, who headed the team that conducted the survey. "In the past, a

company might assume an employee's best efforts would be delivered in exchange for a paycheck. That scenario puts the company as lead and the employee as subordinate. Today, employees want more of a partnership. They want recognition of what each brings to the table, and in return, they provide personal investment. When employees from 'Best Places' companies talk about their organizations, there is a sense of identification with that company, with its vision, its values and its outcomes. This pride and sense of ownership propels discretionary effort and in turn produces enhanced financial outcomes for the company."

Many Generations

At the banking giant **Marshall & Ilsley Corp.**, executives pay a lot of attention to the differences from one generation to the next – in work style, in expectations, in what they need on the job. "One

"Today, employees want more of a partnership."

– MRA Research
Director
Bonni Yordi



MORTENSON CONSTRUCTION
Topped the chart of medium-sized companies.

professionals as much as tenured veterans." It supports, among other things, an internal networking organization for young professionals in the company.

The company also responds to generational differences with flexibility – in the form of part-time schedules, job-sharing, and other practices that help employees balance work life with personal life – as they move through different phases of their lives. Workers qualify for the company's health insurance plan even if they're on a half-time schedule of 20 hours a week. And they have room to shift from full- to part-time status and back again if they need to accommodate more family time.

Indeed, flexibility has become increasingly common in these workplaces and plays a role in an employer's ability to respond to workers across their career cycle. Whether Boomer, Xer or Millennial, workers "all want work/life balance – for different reasons," says the MRA's Yordi. The youngest work-

ers, who have grown up in a world that more than ever emphasizes leisure pursuits and activities, aren't about to let that go just for the 9-to-5. Middle-aged Gen X workers need time for family responsibilities and perhaps caring for aging parents. Boomers, too, confront the challenges of caring for their elders, but others, Yordi says, "are getting ready to retire – some don't want to work full-time anymore."

Mortenson Construction, a Minneapolis-based global construction company with one of its 10 national offices in Brookfield, offers periodic sabbaticals to workers. The company also allows employees such as Alicia Dupies, director of project development, to work part-time schedules without discounting their value to the company. There's a reason for such employee-friendly policies, says Mark Sherry, general manager and vice president in charge of the

of the largest challenges for us is managing a multigenerational work force," says Mary Thompson, senior vice president for talent strategies at M&I. As many as four or five generations – from retirement-age pre-boomers born before World War II through incoming Millennials born since the 1980s – work side by side.

"We have a preference for bringing different generations together," says Stacey Murphy, vice president for talent development. As younger employees show aptitude to rise, they're invited to take part in an Excellence in Management Workshop. The goal here is to make sure people have management skills when they're promoted, instead of promoting people as a reward for their superior technical skills without preparing them for the specific people-related responsibilities management entails.

As one M&I employee observes, "Management values young



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WEST ALLIS

WAUKESHA

GREENFIELD

WAUWATOSA

DOWNTOWN

NORTH SHORE

Photo by David Bader

Brookfield office: "If you don't respond to the changing culture and team members' interests, you're falling behind."

Kerry Group is a worldwide manufacturer of food flavorings and ingredients. Its U.S. headquarters is in Beloit, while it has offices in Brookfield and Waukesha and plants in Jackson, Sturtevant and Germantown. The company offers young workers an opportunity to rise quickly and experience a wide range of challenges. "A lot of our professional employees come right to us from college, and there's a lot of on-the-job training, a lot of hands-on experience," says Gerry Behan, company president.

One of those college recruits was Ryan O'Toole, who joined Kerry with a microbiology degree and started working a third-shift job in a factory lab instead of going to dental school. "I was the grunt," says O'Toole. But he willingly moved around a lot, working at plants in Georgia and Indiana as well as several in Wisconsin. Now, at age 34, he manages Kerry's Sturtevant plant.

Kerry, too, opts for a flexible approach to work duties. "If I give somebody the opportunity to work at home when they need to, when I come to them with a request to stay over late, they're a lot more willing to say, 'Yeah, sure,'" O'Toole says.

At the national accounting firm **Deloitte & Touche**, Margie Grayson got the chance to move from Tennessee – where she had been hired 18 years ago when she was in her mid-30s – back to Milwaukee, where she had grown up. "I'm at a different point in my life now than I was 18 years ago," says Grayson. "They valued me enough at my age to let me do that. Diversity is very important for them, not just gender or race, but also age and bringing different experiences to the table."

Indeed, Deloitte has been paying more and more heed to working with employees on their continuing career paths, says Jacalyn Valent, director of human resources at Deloitte's Milwaukee office. Flexibility, says Valent, isn't just an accommodation to employees. "We're expecting it to be a competency of all of our leaders."

And at **Paragon Development Systems** in Oconomowoc, the company has begun adopting a "career portfolio philosophy," says Todd Radke, the information technology company's human resources director. "Our responsibility as an organization is to provide the individual an opportunity to fill their career portfolio with whatever skills they need to reach their next goal in life," says Radke. "You need to think and act like a CEO of your own career."

Radke acknowledges the effort is still experiencing growing pains, but for some workers, the underlying message is clear – and welcome. Says one: "My job might be what I am doing now, but PDS is my career."

"You need to think and act like a CEO of your own career."

– Todd Radke,
Paragon
Development

Lifelong Learning

Here's one sign of the seriousness with which so many employers take training their workers: In our ranking of the 10 best employers for training, first place was a six-way tie.

At the Brookfield engineering firm **Arnold & O'Sheridan**, Chief Operating Officer Steve Roloff could be speaking for many of his counterparts at other companies when he explains the importance of training: "We look at bringing everybody in here somewhere along the ladder, then we bring them up the ladder," Roloff says. "You do that by mentoring and training."

The message gets through. "This company uses the skills I have and encourages me to grow and learn more," says one A&O employee.

At **GE Healthcare Financial Services**, "we create an environment of continuing learning – a learning culture," says Christa Corrigan, Boston-based manager of human resources for the company's Brookfield operations. Annual training is a given, with most employees taking at least 40 hours of training a year. Annual performance reviews aren't just report cards to justify a raise. They're an overall assessment of career aspirations as well as concrete

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Special Interest

When it comes to hiring multigenerational staffs, training, and engaging workers, these companies shine.

	Final Rank	Company	Size
Multigenerational Employees	1	Marshall & Ilsley Corporation	L
	2	Kerry Group	M
	3	Mortenson Construction	M
	4	Paragon Development Systems, Inc.	M
	5	Johnson Financial Group	L
	6	Derco Aerospace, Inc.	M
	7	Continental Properties Company, Inc.	S
	8	Deloitte & Touche USA LLP	M
Training Employees	1	Johnson Financial Group	L
	1	Continental Properties Company, Inc.	S
	1	Assurant Health	L
	1 TIE	Deloitte & Touche USA LLP	M
	1	Marshall & Ilsley Corporation	L
	1	Paragon Development Systems, Inc.	M
	7	Clifton Gunderson LLP	M
	8	Mortenson Construction	M
	9	Arnold & O'Sheridan, Inc.	S
	10	GE Healthcare Financial Services	M
Engaging Employees	1	Mortenson Construction	M
	2	Clifton Gunderson LLP	M
	3	Tailored Label Products	S
	4	Paragon Development Systems, Inc.	M
	5	Kahler Slater	M
	6	Johnson Financial Group	L
	7	Derco Aerospace, Inc.	M
	8	Continental Properties Company, Inc.	S
	9	CG Schmidt	M
	10	R.A. Smith & Associates, Inc.	M

accomplishments, and they help set the agenda for each employee's training priorities in the coming year. "We really try to tailor it to the individual," Corrigan says. The results are employees who say, as one did, that "the opportunities for growth, involvement and success are almost infinite!"

At **Assurant Health**, an insurer based in Downtown Milwaukee, training "is an integral part of whether or not a company is successful," says Ruth Gilbert, Assurant's vice president for training and development. Training is a core strategy for the company. "In the past we've been able to go to the market and get people with experience," says Marygrace Curatola, director of human resources. "Now it's been really important to train and develop our own talent."

To be sure, much of that is for technical reasons: The legal framework in which the insurance industry operates, and the array of insurance products the company offers its customers, is constantly evolving. But technical skills aren't enough, says Gilbert; 30 percent of an employee's performance rating is based on the company's desired "core competencies" – whether the employee can build credibility and trust, deliver results and collaborate with others. And training at Assurant – and most other employers – extends beyond the classroom, with mentoring programs, opportunities to shadow people in very different jobs, and participation on advisory boards that allows people from across the company to get a close look at a particular segment of the operation and recommend strategy and execution. "It's just as important to grow wide as to grow tall," says Curatola. "Development and advancement don't just mean getting to the next position. You could be growing across the organization and learning different things, or in your current role."

Assurant employees told us the impact of all this attention to training and development is to help them feel valued. The company "invests in its employees," says one. "It supports the individual in many great ways."

Mentoring programs are common. One such program, at **Clifton Gunderson**, pairs all employees with a manager who isn't merely a supervisor, but more of a coach whose task is to encourage and challenge the employee to think in the long term about career steps. "It definitely makes you feel like you have somebody that's watching out for you," says Rick Krueger, a senior associate for the accounting firm. "I always know if I have any sort of problem or concern it will be addressed right away."

Another trend in training-intensive workplaces is to construct in-house "universities." Mortenson University offers self-paced, Internet-based instruction in a wide range of topics that Mortenson Construction employees can pursue either at work or on their own time. M&I, meanwhile, is building its own brick-and-mortar M&I University – tangible evidence of the growing importance of training and development at the company, says Thompson, M&I's talent strategist. And Deloitte & Touche is in the process of selecting a site for its planned Deloitte University, to be used to train Deloitte employees all across the nation. "The business climate is changing at such a pace, you've got to



DELOITTE & TOUCHE
From Millennials to Xers to Boomers, its staff crosses generational lines.

be ahead of the curve," says Valent, the HR director. "You have to continually get better to be the best."

Employee Engagement

In many ways, though, a workplace that welcomes all generations and helps employees acquire new skills and grow in their jobs is just a means to an end. The real test is how fully engaged employees feel in their work. "Engagement is not the next big thing – it's here," says the MRA's Fronk. "In most organizations, there are some highly engaged employees who are cheerleaders for the organization, who understand its mission and vision and give 110 percent every day. Some are actively disengaged. And most CEOs feel that most workers fall somewhere in the middle."

"How powerful it would be," she adds, "if you could capture the imagination, the discretionary effort of that middle group of employees – move them up by investing in them, by developing their skills, by growing their jobs and the impact they have on the organization. If you can get 10 to 20 percent more, that's huge. And it isn't one thing that gets you there; it's compensation, it's benefits, it's communication and more. The best companies out there really understand that, and they work at that engagement from 10 different angles."

R.A. Smith & Associates, an engineering firm in Brookfield, went so far as to open up an office in Pittsburgh after an employee suggested just that, largely because of the firm's

ongoing relationship with a consultant who was based there. "People are always free to exchange ideas and make comments," says owner and founder Rick Smith. "We're not afraid to take chances."

A similar spirit seems to pervade many of these companies. One is **Tailored Label Products**, a precision label maker in Menomonee Falls and one of the few manufacturers in our list. The company, one worker tells us, finds ways to encourage employees "to come up with new and better ways of not only helping our company, but that of our customers also." Owner and CEO Mike Erwin says one way the company put together a cohesive team is by posing a surprising question when selecting workers: "Every interview we have with a potential employee, we ask, 'Where has your job failed? What makes you angry? What makes you joyous?'" Erwin says. "It's really paid off from an employee productivity standpoint."

A number of our Best Places to Work are companies that produce distinctive services or products. On the surface, **Derco Aerospace** is almost the opposite. As a distributor of parts that go to private companies as well as to military entities – parts that can be purchased through a variety of channels – Derco is virtually dealing in commodities. "There's nothing about us that's unique except getting you the product when you need it," says Paul Wangerin, vice president for human resources.

To respond, Derco strives to offer its customers "integrated solutions rather than com-

Crunching Numbers / the methodology

THIS IS THE FIFTH "Best Places to Work" article *Milwaukee Magazine* has produced in conjunction with MRA-The Management Association. Waukesha-based MRA is a Midwest regional employers association and research firm that assists companies in recruiting, developing and retaining employees.

To identify this year's Best Places to Work, MRA invited employers in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Washington, Racine, Kenosha and Walworth counties to complete surveys of their employment practices. The surveys covered nine areas: pay; benefits; other perks; turnover; work/life balance; training and employee development; diversity; community involvement; and employee voice.

An optional, supplemental survey was conducted, drilling into three special categories: Managing a multigenerational work force, training, and employee engagement.

To make our final lists, participating employers had to cross several hurdles. First, each was required to complete a survey on company practices. Employers remained eligible if they met minimum scores set by MRA in each size category and in each of the three special categories.

High-scoring companies then advanced to the next step, where their workers completed anonymous online surveys. Scores from those surveys were used to further winnow the field.

Milwaukee Magazine then followed up with interviews of executives and managers at winning companies and their employees. Both MRA and *Milwaukee Magazine's* parent company, Quad/Graphics, were excluded from consideration in the survey. ■



EPPSTEIN UHEN
The Milwaukee architectural firm's airy Third Ward digs.

peting part by part," says Mark Hoehnen, Dercos president. Through changes in company management and ownership – once privately held, Dercos is now a unit of the conglomerate United Technologies, through its Sikorsky Aircraft unit – Dercos questioned employees closely about how to improve the firm, and listened. "The feedback we got was that people wanted to do their jobs better," says Wangerin. A principal vehicle for employee engagement is the company's ACE program. "Achieving Competitive Excellence" enlists employees in ad hoc teams to solve immediate problems at the company.

Employee engagement is probably never more critical than when life is on the line. Nationally, one in five workplace deaths occur in the construction industry, more than what you'd expect given construction's 6 percent share of the work force. Milwaukee construction company **CG Schmidt** has been on the forefront of making one of the nation's most dangerous industries safer.

The firm pioneered the practice of employing its own full-time safety director, says Mike Abuls, Schmidt's executive vice president and chief operating officer. Today, the company audits every project for safety on a weekly basis – and it's everyone's job. "We train our people to identify hazards," Abuls says. "It's not just our field superintendents that are responsible for keeping our job sites safe. We try to push that down to the lower levels. It helps raise the skill sets of our employees."

It's just one example of how Schmidt seeks to engage employ-

"The best and brightest won't work in a nonengaging environment."

– Dave Wietor, Continental Properties

ees. "If you don't have that sense of ownership with what you are doing, projects just don't work out," Abuls says.

John Dubé is a South Milwaukee native and West Point graduate who went to General Electric after 10 years in the Army and followed that up by working for a major national construction firm. Eager to come back home, he joined Schmidt two years ago as a project manager. He says his new employer operates with the same sort of sophisticated approach as the most progressive companies many times its size. "The big companies have learned that 'management' isn't efficient," Dubé says. "Leadership is

efficient. That means treat everyone as an individual and let them work to the utmost of their strengths."

From one company to the next, one term sums up how they're trying to foster a workplace that is both good for employees and good for business: culture. Within **Kahler Slater's** culture, engagement starts with the company's consciously formulated vision statement. It sets forth the core values of trust and openness – values that are "real, not just words on paper," insists Jim Rasche, one of the architectural firm's three co-equal chief executives. "I may be one of the top executives, but if I'm having a bad day and stepping on someone's toes, I hope that they get in my face about that, and I expect they would." Then there is the company's purpose, framed as such: "To enhance life through thoughtful design." The key, though, is to not assume that only the architects are im-

Help Wanted

A forecast of future jobs.

NO JOBS IN Milwaukee? Not quite.

A survey two years ago by the Employment and Training Institute at UW-Milwaukee found more than 10,000 full-time and 4,000 part-time job vacancies in Milwaukee County alone, and 27,000 overall in the seven-county Milwaukee area.

Manufacturing, with 25 percent, and health care, with 13 percent, were the leading sources of job openings in the 2006 UWM survey, conducted by the institute's director, John Pawasarat. "There's an incredible shortage of nurses," he notes.

Some 80 percent of full-time jobs required either a four-year college degree or lesser training, ranging from an associate's degree to apprenticeship programs to more limited previous experience and training. And 57 percent of part-time jobs had the same college or other training requirements.

Milwaukee County accounted for just over half of the region's job vacancies, and the greatest demand for applicants with at least a four-year college degree.

While there have been studies that go farther out in time in forecasting future job vacancies, Pawasarat says he's skeptical of those findings because they can't predict future shifts in the economy that might lead to growth or cutbacks in certain sectors.

"The condo boom in Downtown Milwaukee helped bring up demand for construction," he explains. In addition, it brought more residents back to Downtown, which in turn has had an impact on the complexion of the economy. Yet none of the earlier projections for job growth in the area would have accounted for that development before it took place. ■

JOHNSON FINANCIAL
The Racine firm, our No. 1 large-size company, strives to be a "workplace of choice."



portant in carrying that out. "Everybody in the organization has a role," Rasche says. And "everybody in the organization understands that."

As one Kahler Slater employee told us, "It's wonderful to work for a company where you can go to anyone to ask a question. No one has ever turned me away or made me feel inadequate for asking anything." The result, says another, tends to draw to the company people who are especially dedicated. "People who aren't passionate about what they do simply don't last long here."

In a similar vein, the Menomonee Falls-based **Continental Properties Company Inc.**, which develops hotel, retail, and residential properties around the country, has crafted a corporate statement called the Continental Creed that stresses high standards, ethics and respect. "When the CEO joins you at your desk to discuss a project instead of calling you to his office, you know you're in a good place," one employee told us.

Continental founder Jim Schloemer says he looks as closely at employee satisfaction indicators as he does financial reports when trying to measure the success of the company. The reason is rooted in the company's ethical culture – but it has a practical side, too. "There's a talent war going on," says Dave Wietor, Continental's vice president for human resources. "The best and the brightest – they won't work in a nonengaging environment."

Which points to yet another side of all the Best Places to Work uncovered in our survey: Along with being fun and exciting, they are challenging, demanding and selective. "People come to work here and have to work hard, they have to deliver," says Russell Weyers, chief operating officer at **Johnson Financial Group**, the Racine-based banking company. (Although the bank is owned by the same family that owns S.C. Johnson & Son, popularly known as Johnson Wax, it is a separate corporate entity entirely.) Johnson Financial is one of just four companies that landed in all three special categories.

Employees told us Johnson Financial lives up to the goal: providing extensive training opportunities, creating a culture of inclusiveness, fostering work/life balance, setting high ethical standards, and at the same time giving employees the freedom to carry out their jobs as they see fit.

Johnson Financial's core strategy is to be a "workplace of choice." "We couldn't do for our clients what we do if we didn't have a long-term, committed and engaged work force," says Weyers.

At the same time, Johnson – and every other company on this list – looks closely at each prospective employee who walks through the company's doors. "We are very clear with new associates at all levels what this culture is, and to make sure their thinking style fits it," says CEO Richard Hansen.

And that is likely to be the Best Workplace of the Future: Inviting and exciting, but also highly selective.

Says the MRA's Fronk: "There's a very strong recognition in business today that you're not choosing a high-performing, results-oriented, profitable work force, or these other things – a flexible workplace, work/life balance, and so on. It's an *and*. We don't want our high-performing team member having to choose between being a good parent and a good employee. They can be both."

For workplace and worker alike, they will likely have to be. ■

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