

Business Ledger | updated: 5/27/2016 11:27 AM

# Business Ledger honors 74 companies as exceptional workplaces



Amy Bastuga of Radio Flyer Inc. accepts the 1st place award for the Daily Herald Business Ledger's Best Places to Work in Illinois, Small Employers.

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What makes a company a great place to work?

Generous benefits and employee engagement are common threads among the companies that comprise the Daily Herald Business Ledger's Annual Best Places to Work in Illinois program.

Oh, and keeping your employees well fed helps, too.

More than 400 people came to celebrate the 74 companies that were named to the 16th annual list at the event held Thursday at the Hilton/Chicago Oak Brook Hills Resort and Convention Center.

The program, administered by Best Companies Group of Harrisburg, Pa., identifies businesses whose work environments benefit its workforce, business and the state economy. The companies were classified in one of three categories based on number of employees and ranked based on a written survey of the company and interviews with a sampling of its employees.

The 74 companies winning the award enjoyed a 91 percent employee engagement rate, according to Best Companies Group President Peter Burke.

Keynote speaker Tony Lepore, director of brand strategy for Shaker Recruitment Advertising & Communications in Oak Park, highlighted four areas of "employer branding" that can help companies build on the "Best Place to Work" honor.

"We understand that there is a war for talent being waged and that the limiting factor -- looking out five to ten years -- will be an organization's ability to attract and retain best-fit talent, if we haven't already felt the pinch," Lepore said.

He highlighted thinking differently, knowing what your best-fit talent looks like your audience, measuring performance and disrupting the status quo.

"If we're not actively working to elevate the brand, we tend to work against it," he said.

Ranked No. 1 in the small companies category (19-99 employees) for a second year in a row is Radio Flyer Inc. Chicago, the manufacturer of the iconic red toy wagon. The company, which offers 100 percent employer paid medical and dental coverage, profit-sharing, tuition reimbursement, paid volunteer time off, an on-site health assessment program and chair massage and wellness reimbursement, encouraged employees -- known as "Flyers" -- to "become kids again, with pride in the big red wagon."

The family-friendly workplace provides paid maternity and paternity leave, celebrations for significant events in Flyers' work lives and personal lives, spontaneous awards and a true work-life balance.

The company will celebrate its centennial year next year.

"The important part of winning is who you are winning with, that is why you guys are having such a good time," said Amy Bastuga, Radio Flyer vice president of human resources. "Thanks for offering us a format to benchmark so we can all continue to aspire to become better and great so we can continue to have amazing organizations."

Skender Construction of Chicago is ranked No. 1 for mid-sized companies (100-499 employees) for the fourth consecutive year.

The company is recognized for quick responses to customer needs, custom solutions and personal relationships that last beyond the final day of the project. There is an administrative appreciation program, in which a country style breakfast is served and company executives publicly reward the support staff with gift cards.

A Rapid Action Team recognizes employees who implement new practices that allow the company to work more efficiently.

There are special anniversary gifts given at 5, 10 and 20 years of service.

Employees participate in numerous team outings, have special summer hours, casual dress code, and a staff Wellness program that includes weekly delivery of healthy snack items. "To be recognized as one of the best, you have to offer a great program that benefit employees' futures and allow them to rise to their own professional goals." said Lisa Latronico in accepting the award for Skender Construction.

No. 1 in the large companies category (500-plus employees) is Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP of Chicago, a global law firm with 760 attorneys in 15 offices located in the United States, as well as Asia and Europe.

Founded in 1927 in Los Angeles, the firm's clients include more than half of the Fortune 500.

Employees have many daily benefits that improve their work environment, from casual days on Mondays and Fridays to free breakfast on Mondays, free beverages all the time and monthly paid public transportation.

The firm's medical benefits premiums are covered at 100 percent by the firm. There are staff profit-sharing opportunities as well. The firm also has awards to recognize attorneys and staff on a monthly basis for hard work and extra effort.

"We've only been open in Chicago for four years and all of us came from other firms," said Betsy Zukley of Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton. "In that short amount of time, we managed to create absolutely the perfect place for us."

More details on all the companies will be featured in a special section in the June 27 issue of the Daily Herald Business Ledger and the Daily Herald.

Presenting partners in this year's Best Places to Work in Illinois program are B. Gunther & Co. Inc., Focus Capital Advisors Inc., Northern Illinois University's MBA Program, Ryan LLC, and Shaker Recruitment Advertising and Communications. Marketing partners are Best Companies Group, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Advocacy Council, MRA -- The Management Association and the Human Resources Management Association of Chicago. Corporate sponsors are All Funds & Games and the Hilton Oak Brook Hills Resort and Conference Center.



Mark Black/mblack@dailyherald.com The Daily Herald Business Ledger's Best Places to Work in Illinois awards ceremony at the Hilton/Chicago Oak Brook Hill Resort and Conference Center.

## 2016 Best Places to Work in Illinois

### SMALL COMPANIES (15-99 Employees)

1. Radio Flyer Inc., Chicago
2. TransTech IT Staffing, Itasca
3. StratEx, Chicago
4. Balasa Dinverno Foltz LLC, Itasca
5. Mueller, Elgin
6. Mainstreet Organization of Realtors, Downers Grove
7. The Salem Group, Oakbrook Terrace
8. Adage Technologies, Chicago
9. Tiger Plumbing Services, Collinsville
10. Synergy Builders Inc., West Chicago
11. MotherG, Itasca
12. Weiss & Company LLP, Glenview
13. BPC, Champaign
14. KRD - Kutchins, Robbins & Diamond Ltd., Schaumburg
15. Alliance Disaster Kleenup, Wheeling
16. TradeTec Skyline, Lombard
17. CDH, P.C., Itasca
18. Fusion OEM, Burr Ridge
19. Quinn, Johnston, Henderson, Pretorius and Cerulo, Chartered, Peoria
20. Optimal Design Co., Arlington Heights
21. American Bottoms Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility, Sauget
22. Lake Forest Graduate School of Management, Lake Forest
23. The Mx Group, Burr Ridge
24. R.J. Augustine & Associates CPA's, Schaumburg
25. Merit Solutions, Wheaton
26. Red Caffeine, Lombard
27. 3Points LLC, Oak Brook
28. Grid Connect Inc., Naperville
29. Michael Silver & Company CPAs, Skokie
30. Black Diamond Plumbing & Mechanical Inc., McHenry

### MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES (100-499

- ### Employees)
1. Skender Construction LLC, Chicago
  2. CompTIA, Downers Grove
  3. Assurance, Schaumburg
  4. WestPoint Financial Group, Peoria
  5. Pariveda Solutions, Dallas TX
  6. Sonoma Partners LLC, Chicago
  7. Clarity Solution Group, Chicago
  8. IPMG, St. Charles
  9. Advanced Resources LLC, Downers Grove
  10. Porte Brown LLC, Elk Grove Village
  11. LaSalle Network, Chicago
  12. Impact Networking LLC, Lake Forest
  13. Omron Automation and Safety, Hoffman Estates
  14. EMKAY Inc., Itasca
  15. Domino Amjet Inc., Gurnee
  16. Savant Capital LLC, Rockford
  17. National Futures Association, Chicago
  18. Hanson Professional Services Inc., Springfield
  19. Meda Pharmaceuticals, Decatur
  20. Proven Business Systems, Tinley Park
  21. Corptax Inc., Deerfield
  22. Redwood Logistics, Chicago
  23. Mindstream Interactive, Peoria
  24. Abercrombie & Kent LLC, Downers Grove
  25. Wiley Education Services, Maitland, FL
  26. Call One, Chicago

### LARGE COMPANIES (500-plus

- ### Employees)
1. Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP, Chicago
  2. Insperity, Kingwood, TX
  3. Edward Jones, St. Louis, MO
  4. Sikich LLP, Naperville
  5. Lockton Companies LLC, Chicago
  6. Ryan LLC, Dallas, TX
  7. Crowe Horwath LLP, Columbus, OH

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