

Endres Goes the Extra Mile

NO PERSON IS AN ISLAND. The old adage applies as truly at the workplace as anywhere else. When you hire someone, you not only employ the person, but you also dramatically impact the life of the employee's spouse or significant other. For one thing, time at work is time away from spouses and families.

That's why **Endres Manufacturing Company** in Waunakee, a family-owned structural steel fabrication business founded in 1926, has developed some creative, company-sponsored activities that demonstrate its appreciation for the sacrifices made by the families of the men and women who labor as machinists, welders, draftsmen and office personnel.

Company-sponsored family activities include golf and softball outings, field trips to Brewers games, and an evening at the Madison Symphony Orchestra. But during the holidays, the Endres family really steps up its efforts. They began sponsoring Christmas parties more than forty years ago, when the company had only seven employees. **Diane Endres-Ballweg**, the founder's granddaughter and head of the family foundation, took over responsibility for organizing the holiday party twenty-five years ago. Each year she chooses a unique theme. The holiday party location remains a mystery for most of the year, though clues are liberally provided to pique everyone's curiosity—last year Monopoly board game pictures appeared in pay envelopes leading up to the celebration.

As guests arrived at the party, they received two hundred dollars in cash after passing the "Go" sign on the way in the door. Each employee also received a Monopoly game chosen to reflect his or her unique interests—dog and cat Monopoly boards for animal lovers; a Harley Davidson board for the motorcycle enthusiast. Then it was time for a reality Monopoly game, except the railroad properties were renamed for Endres construction projects. The grand prize was, of course, an expenses-paid vacation on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City.

The year Overture Center opened (Endres-Ballweg is a longtime patron of the arts), the theme for the holiday party, held at Overture, was "You Are a Star." Employees participated in star-studded games, and lucky winners were awarded with a vacation for two to Hollywood or New York. Other notable Christmas parties: a mid-December luau at Elkhart Lake's Osthoff Resort and a safari scavenger hunt at the Kalahari Waterpark Resort in Wisconsin Dells. At an "Angels and Demons" party held at Devil's Head, employees received Dan Brown's bestselling novel and grand prize vacations to Los Angeles (the city of angels) and Hell (a small town in the Cayman Islands known for

its black limestone rock).

Endres-Ballweg also organizes an annual women's retreat for both female employees and female significant others. "In many places the workers know each other very well, but the spouses are strangers to each other," she says. "This is our way of building relationships with the entire family."

Two years ago, the company treated them to a "Ladies Leisure Living at Lake Lawn Lodge" weekend in Delavan. Prior to the gathering, participants received Joan Anderson's *A Year by the Sea: Thoughts of an Unfinished Woman*, wherein the author describes a year of solitude spent at the beach to rejuvenate herself. An employee's spouse, who is a librarian, led the book discussion. And that was just the beginning. Each woman brought a meaningful possession and explained its significance. From there they composed poems about themselves, using a formula developed by Ellen Kort, Wisconsin's first poet laureate. Annie Ballweg, Diane and Ken Ballweg's daughter-in-law, led a nature walk around the lake.

Last year Endres sponsored "Spend Saturday at the Spa." Timed to relieve the stress that builds between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the homework assignment was inspirational: to read Jim Stovall's *The Ultimate Gift*. Activities began with a potluck lunch at the Endres-Ballweg home followed by a trip to Aniu Salon-Spa-Yoga's Steam Cave and Plunge Pool. Spagoers capped off the day with a complementary spa treatment and supper at the nearby P.F. Chang's.

In addition to parties and retreats, Endres-Ballweg found a novel way to help employees help the community through her role as president of the company's charitable arm—EMC Foundation—which donates fifty thousand dollars annually to local nonprofits. In 2003, the company gave each employee a \$500 check to write out to the charity of his or her choice. Last year, at the annual customer holiday party, the foundation celebrated its tenth anniversary by providing each of the twenty-two tables with a \$1,000 check. People at each table reached a consensus on which nonprofit would receive the donation. Some businesses in attendance made similar contributions.

Through these and other gestures, Endres employees and their families know that they are appreciated. Small or grand, acknowledging and celebrating how we are bound together generate respect for everyone involved.



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