

new  
North



B2B

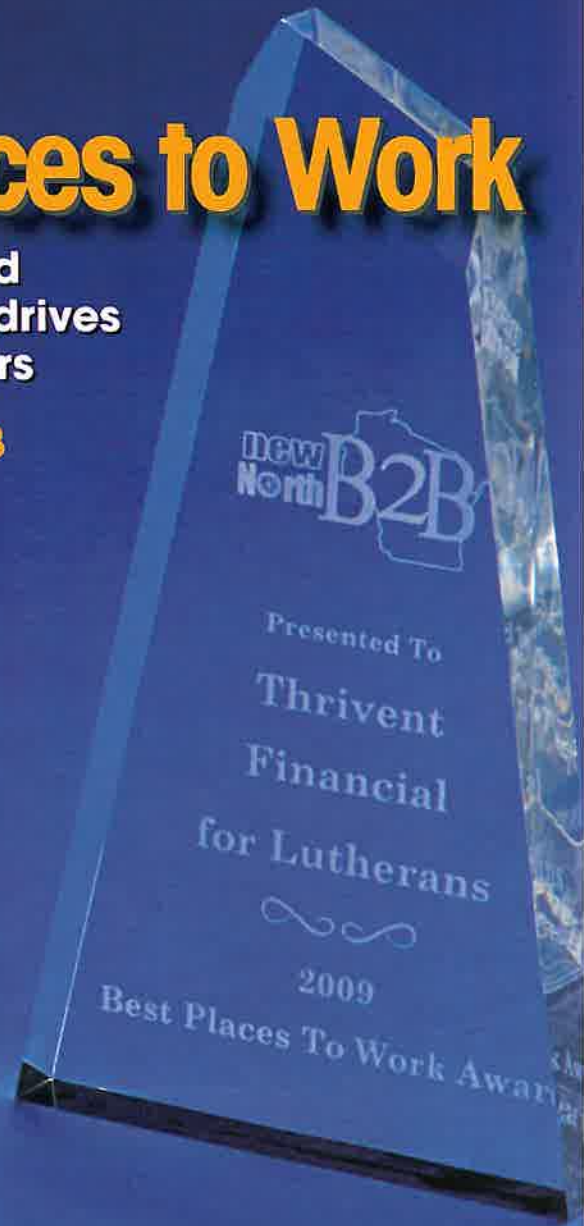
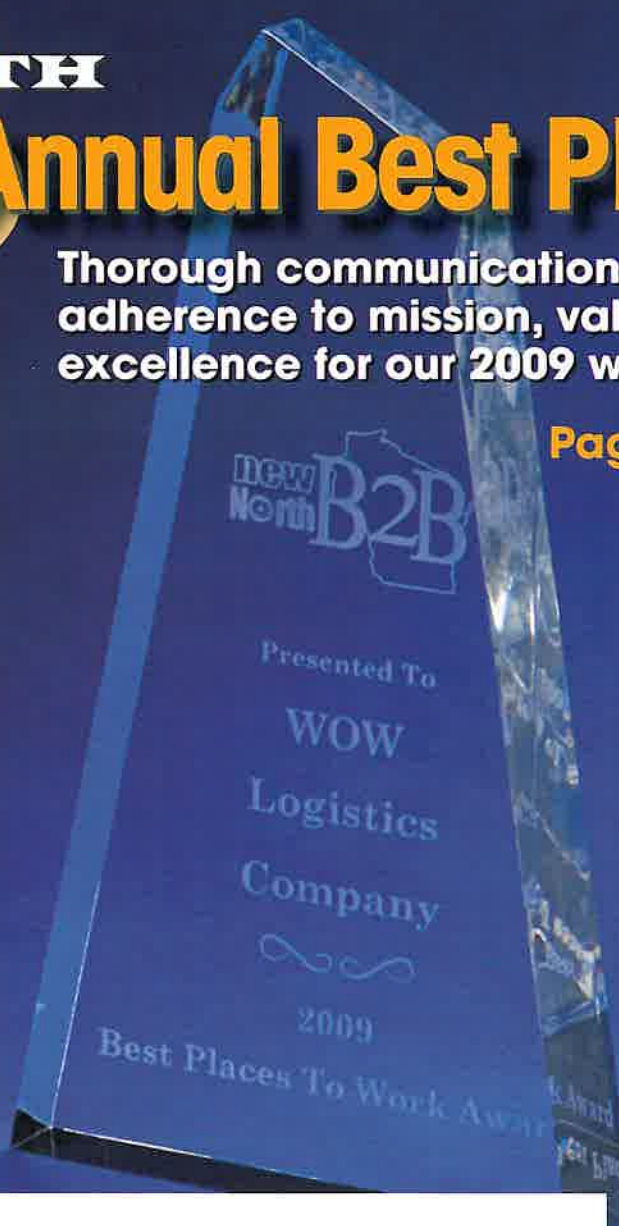
BUSINESS COVERAGE FOR THE NEW NORTH

8<sup>TH</sup>

# Annual Best Places to Work

Thorough communications and adherence to mission, values drives excellence for our 2009 winners

Page 18



PRSR.T STD.  
PAID  
US POSTAGE  
PERMIT NO. 10  
OSHKOSH, WI

October 2009  
\$3.95

# 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Best Places to Work

Thorough employee communications and adherence to mission, values drives excellence for our 2009 winners



STORY BY SEAN FITZGERALD

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COMPANY management and employees might seem like a subtle component of an employer's human resource efforts. Without it, though, operations within an organization can quickly turn into an absolute mess.

Our 2009 New North B2B Best Places To Work recipients keep employee communications high on their list of priorities, going above and beyond to provide unique forums – not only to disseminate information to staff – but for management and ownership to receive critical feedback from employees as well.

Of course, progressive communication wasn't the only reason that we honored Thrivent Financial for Lutherans of Appleton and WOW Logistics of Appleton in our 8<sup>th</sup> annual award. A solid resume of employee appreciation activities, top-notch benefits packages and safe, pleasant and productive work environments also make these employers among the best places to work.

As in past years, our goal in recognizing such efforts toward workplace excellence are aimed at providing examples our readers might be able to implement into their own operations. We recognize that a Fortune 500 company like Thrivent might have greater resources to offer tangible luxuries to employees that a small mom-and-pop shop could never dream. But we also believe there's some characteristics of the workplace culture at Thrivent and WOW Logistics that are transferable to any employer.

Both of our Best Places to Work honorees in 2009 foster an open environment in which employees are encouraged to provide feedback. Management and ownership of these firms don't go above and beyond just to fill job openings, but genuinely

want existing staff to stick around and grow with the company.

They treat employees the same way they expect employees to treat customers and clients. In turn, these employers have cultivated a dedicated and loyal workforce that looks forward to coming into work each day and advancing the goals of their company.

## Thrivent Financial for Lutherans

HOW DOES A ONE-TIME SMALL, FRATERNAL benefits organization grow into a Fortune 500 company and an employer of choice?

It's not necessarily a well-kept secret, but Thrivent Financial for Lutherans has been able to thrive through the years by keeping its corporate mission and values closely interwoven into its workplace culture and the programs offered to employees.

"We're in the business of helping families," said Jon Stellmacher, a senior vice president and the company's chief of staff and administration.

That mission is illustrated in the company's encouragement of its employees to volunteer in the community. In fact, it's encouraged so strongly that Thrivent provides some paid time away from the workplace for employees to attend board meetings and work on various volunteer projects, such as building Habitat for Humanity homes.

"We try to remind new employees to get out and volunteer," said Stellmacher, himself a board member for several community organizations and a past campaign co-chair for United Way Fox Cities. "They'll meet other people. They'll get new contacts."

## WOW Logistics Company

A WAREHOUSE MIGHT SEEM the unlikeliest of outstanding workplaces, but WOW Logistics Company of Appleton has gone out of its way to build an employment environment where staff takes pride in their work and pride in their employer.

Turn over is nearly non-existent among those employees who stay longer than a year, with many of those leaving during the first year typically being second and third-shift forklift operators wanting daytime employment.

"I tell people during the hiring process, 'Once you're here a year, you're a lifer,'" said Lisa Van Straten, senior vice president of human resources for WOW Logistics.

With 175 employees spread out across 13 cities in three different states, communicating a clear consistent message across every level of the organization can have its challenges. But WOW Logistics has implemented a multitude of communication venues to share information with employees, as well as receive valuable feedback.

"We've increased it over the last three years because of being so spread out over so many locations," said Van Straten.

The company's intranet allows any employee to lodge an anonymous question, concern or complaint that goes directly to the executive vice president as well as to human resources. A response to that employee's concern is generated within a few days and shared with the rest of the employees if appropriate. The intranet also provides a daily update on employee birthdays and anniversaries and changes and other new

developments within the company. Monthly employee meetings at each location are attended by executives to update the state of the company.

In addition to the companywide newsletter, each location includes a suggestion box and an "opportunity board" where employees can write their ideas – or write problems that need to be addressed – for everyone else on staff to see. It's up to the manager for the location to take accountability for what's written on the board and respond with a solution or an answer to the idea or concern.

### PROFILE



**Name:** WOW Logistics Company  
**Location:** Appleton  
**Employees:** 130

Last year the company revived its Above and Beyond program, recognizing subtle, spontaneous efforts by employees to exceed the responsibilities of their job description. Managers have the authority to grant that employee a gift card for a local coffee shop or fast food restaurant.

Like Thrivent, WOW Logistics' support of the community is endearing to many of its employees. The company donates to

 The advertisement features a background of architectural blueprints. The text is arranged in a vertical column on the right side. At the bottom, there is a logo for James J. Calmes and Sons, Inc. and contact information.
 

It takes more than  
**six complete  
 blueprint drafts**  
 to perfect the standard  
 construction job.  
 But, it takes only **ONE**  
 construction company  
 to complete it on time  
 and within budget.

**CONSTRUCTION, DELIVERED.**

JAMES J.  
**CALMES**  
 AND SONS, INC.

N2193 Bodde Road • Kaukauna, WI 54130  
 (920) 766-7940 • [www.JamesJCalmesConstruction.com](http://www.JamesJCalmesConstruction.com)

 The advertisement has a blue and yellow color scheme. The word "ACTION" is in large, bold, blue letters with a yellow circle around the 'O'. Below it, "painting & carpet care" is in a smaller blue font. The background features a large yellow shape that resembles a stylized 'A' or a drop.
 

**ACTION**  
 painting & carpet care  
 precision painting & quality janitorial services  
 3463 N. Gillett Street • Appleton  
 920.739.3682

precision  
 quality  
 value

[www.actionpaintingservices.com](http://www.actionpaintingservices.com)

a number of not-for-profit causes in the communities in which it has facilities, and provides sponsorships for charity events and allows employees a role in determining how those philanthropic gifts are made. It even donates its Lambeau Field skybox for one game each year to Make-A-Wish Foundation to treat children to a dream Packer game experience.

"They have helped in so many ways, and when I see the 'WOW' name at functions that are near and dear to my heart, it makes me proud to say 'I work for that company!'" said Laura Kimball, a two-year employee and operations coordinator at the Menasha location.

Loyalty and longevity is generously recognized and rewarded. Upon reaching a 20-year anniversary with the company, WOW foots the bill for an all-expense-paid trip for the employee and their guest. The employee even receives additional paid time off to take the trip. Another trip is awarded for every five years the employee is with WOW after the 20-year mark as well.

"What we wanted to do is to make it a memory for the employee," Van Straten said, indicating the aim is that the employee will always link the experience of the travel with the experience of their long-time employer.

WOW Logistics pays 85 percent of its employees' health insurance premiums. Since it has such a large investment in the health and well-being of its employees and their families, the company provides a comprehensive wellness program. Those on the insurance take a health risk assessment every year. Wellness events have included a companywide walking

challenge, as well as a mock "Biggest Loser" challenge that awarded prizes such as an iPod.

Other perks include an opportunity for employees to watch a Packer game from the company's Lambeau Field skybox. For every home Packer game, WOW holds a tailgate party in the Lambeau parking lot for customers and employees to attend, even if they're seated separate from the skybox during the game.

WOW offers a tuition reimbursement program for all employees which can provide up to 100 percent of the costs of books and tuition if the employee earns an "A" or equivalent in their coursework. Even with a mark of "C," employees will at least be reimbursed for 50 percent of their educational costs.

The company's 401(k) plan matches up to 2 percent of an employee's contribution. Additionally, WOW has two financial incentive programs to promote strong company performance. The first, a profit sharing program, pays employees quarterly as a percent of their base pay when the entire company is in the black. The second incentive – a newly implemented gain share program – pays a monthly bonus to all employees at a location which is able to improve its deliverable over and above what's promised to the customer. Van Straten said the company paid out an extra \$95 to each employee at one of its facilities this past July, the first month in which the program was in place.

The company also maintains a small fitness center at its corporate office in Appleton to complement its wellness initiative.



## Classes Close to Home

Milwaukee School of Engineering's Rader School of Business provides evening classes in Neenah toward the following degrees:

- BS Business Management
- BS Management Information Systems
- MS Engineering Management
- MS Marketing and Export Management
- MS New Product Development



**(800) 332-6763**  
**www.msoe.edu**



Successful building projects begin with the right materials. But, RJ Albright Construction knows you need much more than that. The right team. A great relationship. An emphasis on safety. And trust.

**RJ Albright Construction. Builders you can trust. ■**

5711 Green Valley Road | Oshkosh  
(920) 231-8635 | [www.RJAlbright.com](http://www.RJAlbright.com)

TRUST | INTEGRITY | PARTNERSHIP | COLLABORATION | HONESTY