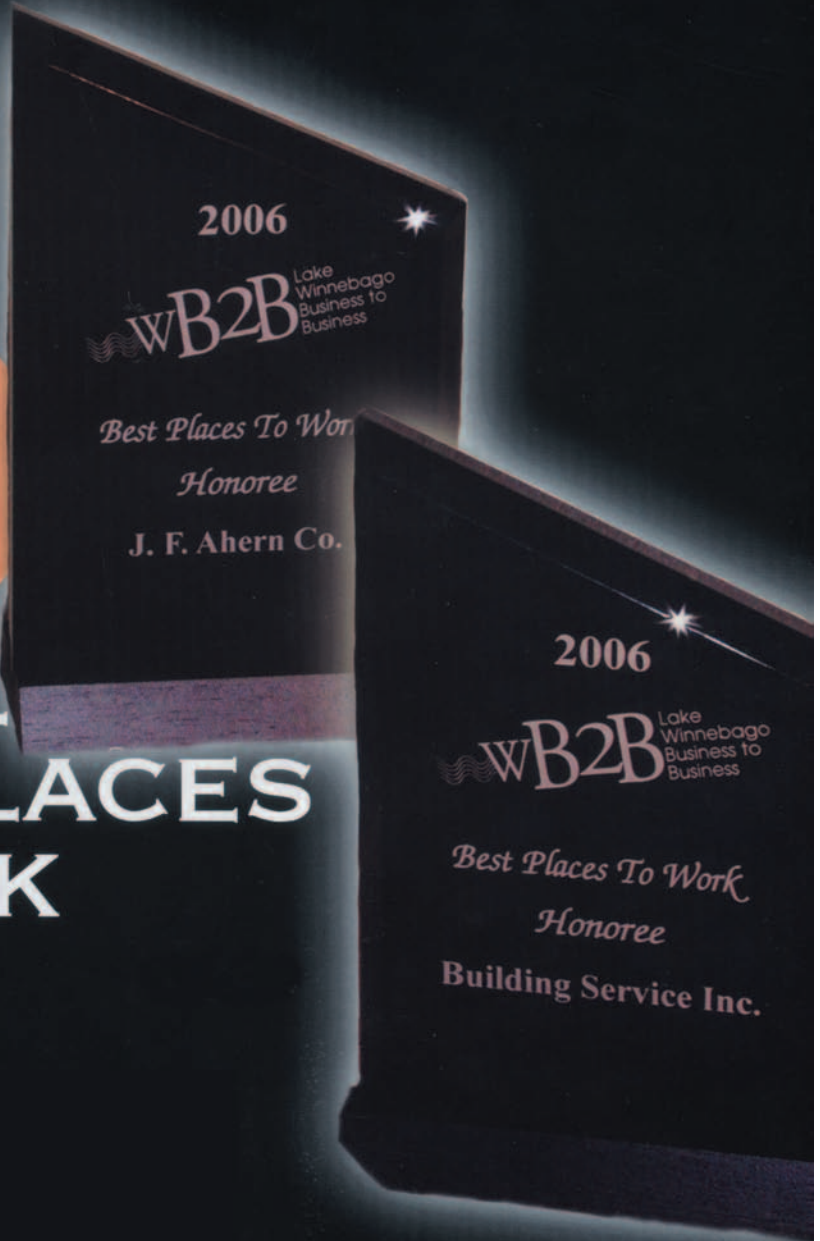




BUSINESS COVERAGE FOR THE SOUTH FOX VALLEY

5TH

ANNUAL
BEST PLACES
TO WORK



October 2006



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5TH ANNUAL BEST PLACES TO WORK

This year's honorees

Story by Sean Fitzgerald

After a long process of evaluating nominations that came in from our readers during the past three months, we're proud to recognize J. F. Ahern Company and Building Service Inc. as our 2006 Lake Winnebago B2B Best Places To Work.

Each of these employers have a lot to offer their staff in terms of making the trip to the office each day something to which to look forward.

Both companies, for example, maintain a strong belief in developing future leaders among their existing staff and promoting from within the organization. Of the nine department heads at BSI, seven initially joined the company in another capacity, and worked their way into a leadership position during their career.

Overall, both BSI and J. F. Ahern provide a variety of amenities that lead to a strong performing work force.

Starting off on the right foot at BSI

Coming into the first day at any job can be a bit unnerving for any new employee. It's the easiest time to feel vulnerable to a new work culture, and can set the tone for an employee's stay with the company.

At BSI, company leaders implemented a new employee mentoring program designed to make new hires feel comfortable from their first day on the job. For the first full year an employee is with the office design and build firm, they are paired with a veteran employee to help teach them the ropes. The mentor is assigned to

the new employee just as they arrive, and even takes them out to lunch that first day on the company dime.

"Your mentor is your guide to BSI and will help you find the answer or direct you to the right person that has the answer," wrote Gwen Graves, the marketing director at BSI, in her nomination for Best Places To Work. Graves said the mentor helps new employees get oriented faster, learn the culture of the company, as well as the personalities of the people they work with daily.

The mentorship program has been in place at BSI for more than 10 years now, and it's generated more than just soothing comfort for new employees. Many of the mentoring relationships have blossomed into several year friendships that have added more harmony to the workplace.

"A mentor is truly developed with a bond between two people," said Peter Kordus, president of BSI. "A lot of times we find out that person that we pick becomes a mentor for their entire career they're at BSI."

Such a program has been relatively simple to implement and has been little cost to the company, Kordus said, noting the only expense is the cost of the lunch for the mentor and the new employee during their first day on the job.

For a firm that designs, builds and creates office environments for other workplaces, Kordus said it's important that their own employees demonstrate the character of being fulfilled and satisfied in what they're accomplishing for their clients.

"I think a lot of the products and services we provide could be viewed as a commodity," Kordus

said. "But what we really provide to our customers is productivity."

BSI employees have found a tremendous amount of pride in the company's "We Care Program," which does everything from recognizing employee weddings and new babies to cooking meals for the children of an employee stricken with an illness. Last autumn, employees gathered one Saturday afternoon to rake leaves at the home of an employee who had been injured in an accident outside of work.

Though the company's nearly 200 total employees are split between operations in Milwaukee and Appleton, the company does a good job of bringing together employees for holiday parties and company strategic planning sessions. The company also does its best to boast a festive atmosphere, and once each month organizes Associate Appreciation Day, which has included the BSI Olympics and a company-stylized version of the Family Feud.

Management oftentimes goes out of its way to show appreciation for the dedication their staff. In late August, managers at the firm's Milwaukee office marched out to the parking lot with hoses and swash buckets and washed employees vehicles.

Overall, the company has had very little turnover during the past 10 years and a high rate of retention. It's even rehired a handful of employees who left to pursue a different career path, then came back because of people, the experience, and the career fulfillment they missed at BSI.

"We don't lose people – that's what it comes down to," Kordus said.