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BEST PLACES to WORK!

Pacific Landscapes stresses 'integrity'

With largely Latino work force, company seeks to overcome barriers

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BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF REPORTER

SEBASTOPOL – Darryl Orr and David Penry, owners of Pacific Landscapes, have gone to great lengths to manage their commercial landscape management and construction service according to their top company principle of "integrity above profit."

That has paid off in high employee satisfaction in an industry with high turnover.

One worker gave the 55-employee company high marks for "the ability and willingness to do quality work, even at the financial expense of the company."

Mr. Penry noted an ongoing effort within the company is to build bridges between Spanish- and English-speaking employees. Two-thirds of his work force is Latino, and many of those are first-generation immigrants.

To meet that challenge, the company has a translator on staff for meetings, field instructions, employee reviews, safety meetings and parties. The firm also offers tuition assistance and pay raises for English proficiency.



To attract and keep efficient, cooperative workers in an often lower-wage line of work, Pacific Landscapes has continued to offer benefits that other landscapers have stopped because of competition, such as paid vacations and sick time for laborers.

Additionally, the company helps workers in need with small personal no-interest loans to help them cover family emergencies and is considering a retirement plan. The rapport the owners have

built with their work force has led to only one loan default in the 30 years Mr. Penry has been in the landscaping business.

Pacific Landscapes was the seventh-largest commercial landscape contractor in the North Bay last year, with \$2.2 million in 2004 revenues, according to the "Book of Lists."

Mr. Penry has even put his reputation on the line in national advertising and Congressional hearings this year on immigration reform.

"We're treating our workers with respect, dignity and personality," Mr. Penry said.

How the Best Places to Work survey was conducted

Companies selected as Best Places to Work in the North Bay were analyzed by the editorial staff of the BUSINESS JOURNAL on the basis several criteria, including the employer questionnaire, the survey ratings by employees, the number of responses, the size of the company, the breakdown of responses by management and non-management as well as written comments.

In designing the contest, the BUSINESS JOURNAL drew ideas from several national and regional competitions, including Fortune Magazine.

In all, 90 companies were nominated. Among those, 46 participated in the company and employee surveys from which 24 winners were selected. Winners are presented here grouped by size and then by their employee score.

Nominations for Best Places to Work in the North Bay were

sought starting in March. Anyone within a company could nominate their business by completing a simple form. A minimum of 25 employees was required.

Nominated companies were then contacted by

BUSINESS JOURNAL staff and invited to submit a company application and ask employees to complete a brief online survey. The survey was set up through Zoomerang, a widely used online polling site.

Each company was supplied a unique company and access code. All responses were anonymous.

A minimum level of employee response was required across management and non-management, depending on the company's size: 50 percent for companies 25 to 100 employees; 40 percent for those with 101 to 250; 35 percent for those with 251 to 500; 30

percent for those with 501 to 1,000 and 15 percent for 1,000 and above.

Companies were allowed about three weeks to complete the process.

BUSINESS JOURNAL staff contributing to the 2006 Best Places to Work in the North Bay were Assistant Editor Marcia Simmons, Director of Research Noelani Garcia, reporters Dorsey Kinder, Lindsay Riddell, Loralee Stevens and Jeff Quackenbush, Research Assistant Laura Cochrane and special correspondent Gary Quackenbush.

Tomas Chadsey of The Press Democrat's online staff provided technical advice and support in developing the Zoomerang survey.

— Brad Bollinger, Editor