



L-R: Timothy Byrne, Rae Ann Bisbee, Marlene Sommers, Matthew Cranney, Prue Lotharius, Darrell Parrish

## Most Enriching Workplace

### DeForest Area Middle School

*Enriching: The degree to which organizations provide employees with opportunities for achievement and learning.*

Fifth grade teacher Bill Champeau can't help grinning every day he passes through the halls at DeForest Area Middle School.

"When I walk from my end of the building all the way to the other, you hear so much positive stuff going on in the hallways," says Champeau. "It's hard to walk through there without smiling at something that's going on either between the students or the staff members."

It's that aura filling the halls and classrooms, lending to the school's vibrant learning environment. It's not only children who are learning. The teachers are hungry for knowledge, too, and Principal Ann Higgins knows it.

"They like being challenged; they like getting better at what they do." Staff education and interaction are encouraged, and there's an expectation from the district level down to improve each day.

That will to succeed takes on an added meaning at this level. "There's something unique about the spirit of a middle school," says Superintendent Jon Bales, referring to the challenges that come with teaching children who are at such a critical stage in their development. This school's success, according to Bales, is credited to a combination of educators always looking to improve and a school board always looking to the future.

"The district moves forward and that's the best way I can explain the type of place this is to work for," says Higgins, who encourages teachers to leave their comfort zones and try new things. Higgins, a self-proclaimed risk taker, looks at it as a way to build on strengths. "Take some risks. What's the worst that could happen?" asks Higgins. "If you fall on your face, that's okay."

Eighth grade teacher Joe Parker recalled a curriculum transition that tested some veteran teachers' nerves. "For them it could be a bit of a fear to have to say, 'Twenty years into what I've been doing; now I'm doing something new.' To know that they had the support and the » **CONTINUED ON PAGE 118**

## Most Participatory Workplace

### M3: Mortenson, Matzelle & Meldrum

*Participatory: The extent to which organizations give their staff a say in decisions related to their work, jobs and careers as well as the governance and management of the organization.*

You have to love a CEO success story that starts in a mail room. That's where president and CEO Michael Victorson began his career fourteen years ago at Mortenson, Matzelle & Meldrum, a business that provides insurance solutions to other Wisconsin businesses. Victorson, whose playful energy and spirit suggests there is still a kid just below the surface, is a beloved boss who runs M3 like a true democracy.

While the product – insurance – may not be sexy, M3's office infrastructure is, starting with superlative benefits as a major employment draw and ending with a corporate connectedness that supports continuous self improvement and personal renewal. The result is positive energy that begins when the elevator doors open up to an amazing panoramic view of the downtown capital skyline, one that just might get a good Karma nod from any feng shui master. But it's the genuinely happy employees who illustrate this happening workplace, and all fingers point in the direction of Victorson as their leader.

Last year M3 restructured for the first time in twenty years. Going against the board's advice to present the employees with a finished plan for organization, Victorson went to the people for recommendations. "The conventional thinking of managers is that you gotta give [employees] the plan," says Victorson. "But what I have found in my career is the more we allow people to participate in the direction of the company and their own career, the more we get repaid with loyalty, great service to the customers and professionalism."

M3 took a step further last July, creating a Professional Development Department to cultivate new and existing talent. That "companies should formally charge somebody to invest in people" stood out for analyst Tony DiRomualdo of Next Generation Workplace, the company that conducted the Best Places to Work study. "That's real backing and proof that when employers say, 'we're all in this together,' they really mean it." | *Pat Dillon*

■ **M3**, 3113 West Beltline Hwy, President & CEO: Mike Victorson, Employees: 160, Years in Business: 38



(LtoR) Barb Lebica, Deb Kookasemkit, Roz Craney, Barb Romano