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GUARD Insurance Group



They will rise to the challenge

by Elizabeth Thomas Walker

GUARD Insurance Group's leaders like to aim high.

"We believe that to achieve great success for our company, we must accomplish two goals," said Carl Witkowski, the company's chief administrative officer. "First, we

must operate as a world-class organization, and second, we must be an employer of choice."

GUARD — a workers' compensation insurance company based in Luzerne County that operates across a multistate area through a network of independent insurance agents and brokers — purports that

creativity and fun are two integral factors in establishing a positive work environment.

"We believe employees will do their best work in an environment that is conducive to their creativity," said Robert Thomas, communications manager for the company. "Challenging jobs are the most interesting. We've learned to take a chance on people, asking them to assume projects that extend their reach. GUARD is still small enough that individual efforts have a large impact on our success."

Witkowski said the company challenges people then rewards them for taking on the extra responsibility. The company's commitment to challenging employees stemmed from employee input on how to improve the performance review process.

"We asked how they wanted to be measured, and they indicated the reviews should be based on where they think they need to be challenged," he said.

To support employee growth, GUARD makes a commitment to education and career planning. In addition to a tuition-reimbursement program, a corporate university offers on-site and online courses.

"We've also taken traditional positions that other companies may relegate, such as customer service, and elevated those employees to be true business partners,"

Witkowski said.

"That only makes sense," said Thomas, "as those employees are the primary conduit for information from external sources."

Tesha Brady, a regional office sales representative who has been with GUARD for eight years, said she's learned and grown as an employee. "There are lots of opportunities for growth and to move in the direction of your capabilities and strengths. GUARD has invested a lot of time in me," Brady said. "The No. 1 reason I love working here is the people. This is a close, team-oriented, supportive environment."

GUARD's employee benefit package offers employees some unique options.

GUARD's Longevity Award recognizes loyal long-term employees by offering an extra week of vacation after five years, along with a \$2,000 vacation allowance every five years. Employees can also sell back their sick time to earn additional personal time.

Community involvement is another important part of GUARD's culture, Witkowski said. For example, over the last decade, employees have contributed just shy of 50 tons of food to a local food bank.

"We partner with our employees to create a fun, creative, rewarding environment," Witkowski said. "We are in control of this company's destiny as we recruit and retain the best employees."

Paul Halbach, standing, April Dow, middle, and Djoquane Twyman answer inquiries from insurance agents and policy-holders in the customer service department.

