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By the numbers

U.S. maple syrup production up 70 percent in 2013 (compared to 2012 production)



2013 Top-5 Producing States:

1. Vermont 1,320,000 gal.
2. New York 574,000 gal.
3. Maine 450,000 gal.
4. Wisconsin 265,000 gal.
5. Ohio 155,000 gal.

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics
Chart by New England Business Journals.

Special Sections

Fall construction

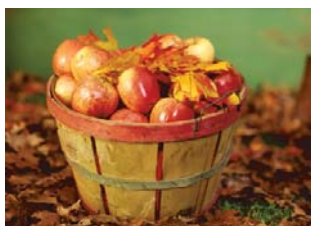
A West Rutland window manufacturer is doubling in size. **5**

Employee benefits/hiring

Internships provide students with valuable work experience, and employers with a new-generation workforce; Vermont companies offer family-friendly benefits; telecommuting allows workers more flexibility. **10**

Fall tourism

Apple season is here, and Vermont's orchards will produce one million bushels of the state's second-largest crop. **13**



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Best of the Best Business **12-13**

Leaf Peepers

The business of foliage



PROVIDED PHOTO

VBT Bicycling & Walking Tours, of Bristol, conducts 80 percent of its in-state business during the fall foliage season.

By **LEON THOMPSON**

The idea struck Natalia Ferens-Hommel in 2010.

After she moved from Connecticut to Stockbridge two years earlier, Vermont's scenery soon reminded her of her native Poland, with "many hidden gems to be found, if you know where to look."

When friends visited from Connecticut and New York City, she would introduce them to her favorite new Vermont spots.

"Travel is one of my biggest passions," she said

this past July, "and because of that, guiding visitors around the state just seemed like the ideal business for me to be in."

So she opened Vermontology, a tour company that focuses on small groups of no more than six people. Vermontology offers guided tour packages during all four seasons, from five-day excursions, with bed-and-breakfast lodging, to custom day trips.

"Fall is our busiest time of year," Ferens-Hommel

Peepers: **14**

Beyond the grind

For some companies, employee happiness comes first

By **JOYCE L. CARROLL**

For some, the workplace is a daily grind. For others, it's a place where fresh ideas are welcomed, on-site downtime is encouraged, and community service is a valued corporate tenet. Creating a happy work environment requires more than the occasional high five for a job well done. Not to be confused with job satisfaction, a quantifier where pride in one's work and validation are core components, the happiness factor is more multi-faceted. Tangible benefits, like on-site gymnasiums and comprehensive medical coverage, coupled with intangibles, like corporate adherence to the triple bottom line and accommodating canine companionship in the workplace, all play a fundamental role.

In an era where task overload is a common repercussion of workforce reductions, fostering a work ethic that benefits both employer and employee is critical. Implementing the principles of person-job-fit, or personality-job-fit, offers a greater assurance of employee satisfaction and, ultimately, productivity, said Brian Moore, a senior research manager for WorldatWork. The nonprofit human resources association focuses on compensation, benefits, and work-life.

"People feel happy when their contribution is being recognized and that the jobs being asked of [them] are for things [they] do best," he said.

Empowerment, trust, and respect further beget happiness.

Workplace: **15**

Let the sun shine

Solar Pro is a source of energy in Manchester

By **LAURA YANNE**

Solar panels are adorning the rooftops of Manchester-area residences and businesses, and soon the modernistic sunflower-like solar trackers will be seen in a field on a main town thoroughfare.

More than 65 solar installations in southwestern

Vermont have been the work of Karen and Jim Lee of Arlington, the owners of Solar Pro. The couple are committed environmentalists, and this respect for the earth drives their desire to "help people save money and reduce carbon emissions, one footprint at a time."

Vermont touts itself as being "as green as it gets," but it is the Lees' dedication to principle that moves them from talking about climate change to actively doing something about it. Indeed, they began meeting with a group of like-minded enviros at the Perfect

Solar: **6**

Workplace

Continued from 1

"It's all about trusting, valuing the people, and recognizing them for a job well done. That is the culture that Dick has established and a culture that people believe in and have bought into," said Patti Friedman, wellness program manager at Hypertherm in Hanover, N.H., while speaking of company President Dick Couch. Hypertherm is employee owned, an arrangement that, by definition, empowers employees.

At Small Dog Electronics, headquartered in Waitsfield, empowerment means trusting that employees will balance their downtime with productivity. Small Dog operates Vermont stores in Rutland, South Burlington, and Waitsfield. Waitsfield employees have the added benefit of the Mad River Path at their doorstep. It is there where employees may spend downtime either hiking, jogging, or cross-country skiing.

"We never find people always walking and not working . . . I certainly get the indication from our employees that they appreciate the flexibility and that we trust them to manage their time," said owner Don Mayer.

Don't worry, be happy (and healthy)

Employers know that preventative health care reduces sick days. And workplaces today do what they can by adding gymnasiums to the physical plant, creating wellness programming, and incentivizing employees to meet their health goals. Hypertherm, and Mack Molding, which is headquartered in Arlington, go a step further. Each has on-site medical care.

Hypertherm has partnered with nearby Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center to provide the services. Friedman, hired less than two years ago, works along with a physician's assistant and nurse practitioner.

"It makes it more convenient and more accessible

for our employees to not miss work. There's no copay to use the wellness center, so it keeps costs down," Friedman said.

Half-hour wellness classes and a wellness fair complete with speakers, augment the on-site health opportunities.

One day a week, employees at Mack Molding can make an appointment with an on-site nurse or physician for personal health and wellness issues. The wellness program also includes routine screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, vision and hearing. Realizing that a healthy diet is also critical to overall wellness, the company has 21 raised-bed gardens at its Arlington headquarters that are maintained by employees.

"We have had a fairly consistent history of employee happiness, we think. [We're always asking], 'What more can we do, what more can we add to the mix,'" said Kevin Dailey, human resources director for Mack Molding's northern operations.

A comprehensive health benefits package at Small Dog extends beyond employees and their families. The company also offers veterinary insurance for up to two dogs. Mayer said he didn't want an employee to have to compromise a winter heating bill over covering the cost of surgery for the family dog.

Social gatherings and civic engagement

So dedicated is Mack Molding to the caliber of its family holiday party, that a 42-foot fir tree was planted on site as a festive focal point. Bells and whistles include a visit from Santa, a bonfire, and sledding opportunities. In case Mother Nature fails to cooperate, the company even has its own snow-making equipment.

Events like the holiday party and an annual company picnic at Great Escape in New York State build relationships between employees, said Nancy Cefalo, human resources manager for Mack Molding's Arlington headquarters.

Community service is encouraged at each of these



PROVIDED

Employees tend to one of the 21 raised-bed gardens at Mack Molding.

companies, and so much so that employees receive paid time off to give back, or corporate sponsorship if participating in an event.

"Our community service benefit is a job requirement. It's a paid day off to do community service," Mayer said, adding it doesn't matter if the activity is a planned event or something as simple as helping an elderly neighbor stack firewood.

The yardstick measure

Optimism, it's been said, is a glass half full. But how does one measure happiness? And why is it so important that an employee be more than just satisfied with the work he or she does?

Tried and true, employee surveys can reveal much about workplace conditions, job satisfaction, and overall happiness. Moore, of WorldatWork, said annual surveys are typical, but more frequent pulse surveys, ones where an employee responds to a single question via a monthly survey, can also be effective.

"It's not the frequency that matters, but how you use the results. It's important to let employees know you've taken action," he said, referring to the response to their concerns.

From an employer's perspective, the latter question, the one regarding the importance of happiness, goes beyond the desire for improved productivity.

Store employees at Small Dog Electronics are expected to have extensive knowledge about Apple products. As such, employee retention is critical to the company's bottom line.

"[It's about] understanding the real cost of recruitment and training of employees, and realizing the dollars-and-cents significance of employee turnover. Keeping employees happy pays off [with regard to] retention," Mayer said.

At Mack Molding, retention is not only measured by an individual's longevity, but is also evident through the number of multi-generational employees. Like grandma's favorite sauce recipe, word travels from father to daughter, and from mother to son, that the company treats its employees well.

"Mack has a lot of that," Cefalo said, referring to the multi-generational nature of its workforce.

Added Mayer: "Providing these benefits creates a more human-oriented place. It's a part of the triple bottom line. We want people raving about coming to work rather than dreading it." ❖

Have you recently opened a new business?

We would like to share your news with the entire business community. E-mail us the information and if photos are available, include them also.

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