

ALTERNATIVES MANAGERS

Fifth Place (tie) Harrison Street

Entrepreneurial culture, office morale garner high praise



From its airy offices on the 35th floor, Harrison Street Real Estate Capital LLC offers breathtaking views of Chicago's financial district.

To be sure, the bustling energy of the city is a potent recruiting tool, executives said. Since 2010, Harrison's employee roster has more than doubled, to about 80 full-time professionals and staff members now compared with 30 then.

But building a cohesive and highly functioning team takes more than pretty offices with sky-high views, and those efforts are yielding fruit.

For the second year in a row, Harrison Street has been recognized in *Pensions & Investments'* Best Places to Work in Money Management.

In responding to the survey, employees praised Harrison Street's entrepreneurial culture, its support of work-life balance and the quality of their peers as motivating factors.

"As a working parent, I have respect, support and flexibility from the organization as I juggle the work I do in the office and the work that I do at home," one employee wrote.

Added a second: "Management's belief in their employees leads to great office morale and the belief that we can and will achieve all of the companywide and individual goals."

Perks abound. The company pays 90% of medical insurance premiums for employees and their families, and there is no deductible. An internal wellness program awards points for healthy behavior, with gift cards for winners. Smaller efforts include birthday celebrations each month for employees, a free lunch on the last Friday of each month, and kitchens stocked with snacks and drinks.

When seeking prospective hires, President and CEO Christopher Merrill said employees are encouraged to tap their networks for potential colleagues. Internships help students learn more about their interests as well as help Harrison Street get a bead on prospective employees, he said.

An employee survey every other year helps Harrison determine different programs to enhance employees' personal well-being and professional growth, said Stacy Nyenbrink, vice president of human

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COOKING UP A GOOD TIME:

Employees got into the kitchen, far left, to help out with Meals from the Heart, a program to aid families staying at Chicago's Ronald McDonald House. At left, employees took a trip on the waters of Lake Michigan, which was a highlight of the company's annual outing.

resources. A suggestion that's being implemented: adding yogurt, fruit and KIND bars to the snack offerings.

The nature of the work is fulfilling as well, Mr. Merrill said. Since its founding, Harrison Street has bought or developed nearly 500 properties in student and senior housing, medical offices and self storage, sectors that he said make up the "fabric of society," regardless of the current business cycle.

"I think we're adding to society in what we're doing."

— JULIE TATGE