

## Calgary firms flourish in top 100

Eight companies named to list of best employers

**Derek Sankey**

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Racing ahead of any other province in economic growth, Alberta is finding itself at the forefront of new recruitment and retention tactics and companies are making good on some lofty promises to employees.

This year's annual ranking of the nation's best employers by Mediacorp Canada Inc. shows several Calgary companies in the top 100, many of which are investing dollars in their communities and taking the war for talent to a higher plateau.

"This company has been through quite a period of mergers and acquisitions, so finding ways to achieve employee stability and security was absolutely vital," says Nicole Davis, a senior business partner with Calgary-based Bayer CropScience (Canada) Inc.

For the past six years, her company has made two large acquisitions and a smaller addition. During that time, Alberta's economy was thrust into high gear and a lack of qualified employees began to emerge.

Wage increases lead the country. Home prices were skyrocketing. Thousands of people have pushed Calgary's population to more than a million people and companies face increasing costs on almost every front.

Yet, the approach Bayer CropScience takes allows the company to retain a highly specialized workforce, says Davis.

"It just makes people very vocal about their own careers and their own futures," says Davis. Professional development is seen as an essential offering from any employer of choice.

Bayer CropScience has offices scattered around Canada, and has had to deal with local anomalies in compensation trends while maintaining a national focus.

"We have a different culture in every pocket of the country that way," Davis says. Bayer CropScience is a biotechnology firm that manufactures crop science products for a range of uses in agriculture and environmental health industries.

The company also spends a lot of time and money on corporate social responsibility programs. Local employee-run volunteer groups oversee where the money goes and how employees get involved. The company contributes \$250 each for any donation.

Personal days are "flexible" and arranged between each manager and employee informally. The vacation policy adds two more "floater" days, and a compassionate-care program for workers dealing with elderly relatives and family care for any length of time.



CREDIT: Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald  
Bayer CropScience (Canada) Inc. managers Derrick Rozdeba and Nicole Davis say their firm has prospered in Alberta's tough job market by offering compelling recruitment and retention incentives.

Davis says she expects to expand and revise the vacation policy again in a few months, with it now starting at three weeks.

There are also perks in life-long learning opportunities. Bayer CropScience has a customized "mini-MBA" program with the University of Calgary's Haskayne School of Business. "Provided to them at no cost," says Davis.

The point of all this is that when it comes time to hire an employee -- at any level or salary -- it's a lot easier to find them in this booming economy when you have some respect and reputation among potential candidates.

"It's an incredibly important attraction tool for us," says Derrick Rozdeba, a communications manager for Bayer CropScience. The last time he had to hire someone for the firm, he had a pool of 70 qualified candidates lining up, even in this market.

Many of them stated in their cover letters that they noticed the company made the top 100 list, which has become a well-published annual ranking in recent years. It has also become a powerful draw for other companies looking for new grads.

Michael Lipsett left post-secondary school looking for a unique place to work. He also wanted somewhere he fit in. The Alberta College of Art & Design graduate landed a job at Veer Inc., a Calgary-based design and publishing firm.

"What attracted me to (Veer) when I first walked in to hand in my resume was the whole creative atmosphere and the openness of the entire office," says Lipsett, who joined Veer three weeks ago. "There was an instant sense of community."

Veer made the list of top 100 employers for the first time this year. The company grew its workforce by 60 per cent in the last two years, to a total of about 100.

"The challenge right now, because we're growing so quickly, is making sure that we're recruiting the quality of people that we want to maintain," says Dana Boyko, human-resources manager for Veer. "The physical growth challenge is the size of our space," she says, "so we have to be a little more creative with our space."

Other Calgary companies to make the top 100 are AltaGas Ltd., Enbridge Inc., Rogers Insurance Ltd., Shell Canada Ltd., Suncor Energy Inc. and Worley-Parsons Komex.

derek.sankey@telus.net

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