



DRAWING INSPIRATION



Creative minds work, play and make a difference at Design Collaborative (top), Schmidt Associates (bottom left), Guidon Design (right) and Cripe (next page).

Snow blankets the ground, but Schmidt Associates' employees happily brave the cold as they stroll along Massachusetts Avenue (where the company is based in downtown Indianapolis) to a nearby restaurant. It's a special occasion: the annual moose trek breakfast.

Say what?

"(After the first snowfall of the season), I wear a moose hat I bought on a ski trip many years ago with great big floppy ears," reveals CEO Wayne Schmidt.

"It's worse than you're imagining!" jokes Sarah Hempstead, director of marketing and a principal at the firm.

Laughing, Schmidt continues, "You might think only 10 or 12 people might be in (the office) at 8 a.m., but no! If it's a free breakfast, there'll be 40 people. We sing and we try to make moose sounds as we go up the avenue that day."

Fellow architecture firms Design Collaborative (located in Fort Wayne), Cripe and Guidon Design (both headquartered in Indianapolis) also infuse energy into their workplaces.

Luke Leising, president of Guidon, points to a memorable zip line outing.

"I threw out parachuting for next time!" he declares with a chuckle. "It's something that gets us all out of our environment, and talking and building personal connections."

BizVoice[®] dives into other elements of the culture at these four winning workplaces.

Tools – and perks – of the trade

Design Collaborative is an architectural, mechanical and electrical engineering, and interior design firm that serves clients in higher education, health care and corporate markets. Founded in 1992, it has approximately 50 employees.

President and CEO Pat Pasterick, humble and soft spoken, credits the firm's extraordinary team with its continued success. One way the company thanks them for their contributions is with TGI4:30.

"Every Friday afternoon at 4:30, we knock off early and kind of have a politically incorrect happy hour," he shares. "We gather in the lobby for drinks and casual conversation as an office. This gives everyone a chance to connect beyond day-to-day work and provides an opportunity to decompress before the weekend."

"On Monday mornings, we start the week together (with a staff meeting). It's about being genuine and real with each other. That builds a closeness and a trust, and we try to carry that on with clients too. We think the design ends up better when people are engaged, and when they're dealing with their friends and people that care about them."

Schmidt Associates started with a bang 40 years ago: on July 4, 1976. While Schmidt cherishes past experiences and feats, he's focused on what lies ahead.

"What's most significant is thinking about the future – not the past – and thinking about where we're going," he asserts. "The best project we've ever had is the one we're about to start, so it's all future oriented."

Launched in 1937, Cripe creates a sense of family among its team (comprised of approximately 45 people) with an annual breakfast that invites new employees to hang one of their favorite ornaments on the Cripe Family Christmas tree. The event kicks off the organization's Giving Tree initiative, which supports families in need.

It's a form of servant leadership – a theme that touches all aspects

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

DESIGN FIRMS EMPOWER ASSOCIATES





Partners flipping pancakes? Must be Cripe's annual Mardi Gras Fat Tuesday lunch.



Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines at Design Collaborative!



Luke Leising, Guidon Design president, says "the awesome team we've built" provides the greatest sense of accomplishment.

of Cripe's culture.

"What we've found is that if we're caring and trusting about the success of others, people relax," contends Kara Hensley, director of human resources and marketing. "And when they relax, they relax into high performance and sincere caring. That produces the fun because at the end of the day, we take our work very seriously, but not so much ourselves."

Packed with potential

Guidon, a sustainable architecture and engineering firm founded in 2011, places professional development squarely in employees' hands. They set short- and long-term goals. They attend weekly training on sustainable issues. They complete professional courses (Guidon covers the costs and provides paid time off).

Leising, a former Army ranger, stresses the freedom for his staff of approximately 30 to personalize education.

"Take, for example, an architect working towards a career," he surmises. "We have one architect that's really interested in historic preservation. We strive to assign that individual to those projects and he's getting to do what drives his passion."

Pasterick of Design Collaborative shares a similar philosophy.

"We let employees take time to participate in community initiatives and try to help marry them with their own interests. It's going to help us. It's going to help the community. And it's going to help the employees."

Schmidt Associates pairs new hires with a mentor and a Sherpa, which Schmidt refers to as "an instant friend." Moreover, Schmidt Academy enables them to explore a multitude of topics.

Elsewhere, recent recruits familiarize themselves with The Cripe Way via a 12-week course on project management and company culture (including areas such as planning and servant leadership).

"We always say, 'You're training your replacement.' That doesn't mean you're going to get fired," emphasizes president and COO Fred Green, who leads instruction. "It means that you're going to get another opportunity. I know as I was coming up the ranks, the only reason I ever left a job is because I was bored. But if somebody kept me interested and kept me in a position of being able to learn, I was always going to be there."

Hensley sums it up: "Training here is like the air we breathe."

Knocking down walls

Guidon's vibrant 11,000-square-foot office in downtown Indianapolis, which it

recently rehabilitated, illustrates a fierce commitment to environmental awareness.

Vivid colors – predominantly green and yellow – illuminate the open space. The high-performing building has several green features such as energy-efficient lighting, a dashboard energy tracking system and more. Employees compost, recycle and forego bottled water.

That philosophy attracts like-minded talent.

“One of the things our applicants to a tee usually mention is, ‘You know what? I love the fact that you integrate sustainability into your work. I’m very passionate about helping further causes toward the environment, and this would be a great place to work from that aspect,’” Leising notes.

Count Cripe among the offices with an untraditional layout and unique culture.

“Twenty years ago everybody had their own little office, and now we don’t,” Green recalls. “It’s much better (now). We don’t have silos between service areas.”

Hensley adds, “That open environment is really conducive to me looking over at

someone and saying, ‘Hey, what is this?’ or ‘Do you know how to do this?’ And the other thing is that you hear laughter all the time.”

Design Collaborative removes barriers of another sort: the traditional 8 to 5 schedule.

“Anymore, our work lives are almost 24/7, so you need to give people flexibility,” Pasterick affirms. “The expectation is that it pays off in other ways at other times – and we know it does if it’s 8 o’clock at night and somebody’s responding to a client’s need for something or coming in on the weekend to do some things. We try to be able to adapt so people can enjoy their work, but also enjoy their lives and their families and other things as well.”

Hempstead reflects on her 15 years at Schmidt.

“What drew me here is the type of work we do. We’re pretty selective about our clients and they’re people who are doing good things in the world. They let us help them to do that, and the way we do it – acting out a servant leadership model – is what drew me here and it’s what’s kept me here.”



Schmidt Associates celebrates the holidays at St. Joseph’s Brewery, shortly after completing a project there.

RESOURCES: Fred Green and Kara Hensley, Cripe, at www.cripe.biz | Pat Pasterick, Design Collaborative, at www.designcollaborative.com | Luke Leising, Guidon Design, at www.guidondesign.com | Wayne Schmidt and Sarah Hempstead, Schmidt Associates, at www.schmidt-arch.com

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