: Child's wish to be highway patrolman inspires global nonprofit, Page 12

The usiness Journal
PHOENIX
phoenix.bizjournals.com
OCTOBER 21, 2005
$2.00

EDITORIAL

EPA's commuters program good for business, workers

Notice the brown haze painting the Valley's sky these days?

It's ugly, and it's unhealthy.

But there's a bright spot on that horizon.

There was a significant jump this year in local participation in the Environmental Protection Agency's Best Workplaces for Commuters program.

That's great news. In fact, 45 companies were new to the Arizona list this year, representing more than 45,000 employees — a 76 percent increase over last year.

This is a good time to put forth a challenge.

With gas prices high and companies looking to ease the burden on employees and the environment, this program is an outstanding way to recognize Valley firms for their commitment to the community.

The list of Arizona companies is impressive. The largest employer new to the Best Workplaces for Commuters list is Maricopa County. Arizona State University and St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center also made it this time around.

And companies new to the list run the gamut. Others that offer top-notch commuter benefits include Freescale Semiconductor, Motorola, General Dynamics, JDA Software, Mesa Airlines, Northern Trust Bank and Charles Schwab.

Three of the employers are on the EPA's "top 20" nationwide list. They are: Intel Corp. (1), Boeing Co. (12), and IBM (17).

The program, which kicked off in 2004 with 59 Arizona employers, this year boasts 104; and a total of 134,492 employees are given commuting benefits from these designated Best Workplaces for Commuters companies.

The EPA says that's a savings equal to more than 7 million gallons of gas and 146 million miles traveled. The numbers are staggering.

This is a good time to put forth a challenge for more companies to increase incentives and benefits for employees who participate in trip reduction programs.

To be selected as a BWC employer, companies must offer employees at least one major commuting benefit, such as transit passes, vanpool subsidies, or have a significant telework program.

In addition, at least three supporting benefits, such as preferred parking for carpools, a ride-matching program, and participation in an ozone awareness campaign, must be made available.

While the program is voluntary, we think it is a valuable benefit and a win-win-win for employers, employees and the environment.

Maricopa County's Trip Reduction Program requires businesses with 50 or more employees to develop a plan to reduce commuter miles. Its goals of improving air quality and decreasing traffic congestion are important.

Let's hope that next year's list of participating companies on the Best Workplaces for Commuters doubles, or triples.