

LAKE ERIE Lifestyle

AUGUST 2017

Giving Spirit

YOU'VE GIVEN MILLIONS TO 'ERIE GIVES' OVER THE YEARS

PLUS:

BARREL OF FUN. Erie Brewing shows off its new home



From the August 2017 issue of *Lake Erie Lifestyles* magazine

Advertisement

Emily Grein envisioned herself in a large city following her graduation with an international business degree from Kent State University. Instead, the 28-year-old from a Cleveland suburb found a job at Erie-based Logistics Plus. In the four years she's been employed there, Grein has traveled to places like Mexico and Scotland and has worked her way up to a leadership position.

Nationally, companies are working hard to attract and retain the so-called millennial generation. After all, that generation — largely identified as people in their 20s and early 30s — will account for 75 percent of the nation's workforce by 2025.

Erie companies have struggled to hire and hold on to millennial employees who flee the region post-graduation for more attractive jobs elsewhere. That phenomenon is known as "brain drain," and efforts to reverse it are "the most important long-term part of the puzzle" when it comes to bolstering the local economy, Jim Kurre, the director emeritus of the Economic Research Institute of Erie told the Erie Times-News in 2016.

Logistics Plus CEO Jim Berlin has purposely established a culture at his downtown Erie office that appeals to the so-called millennial generation. That culture embraces ideals the millennial generation craves in its workplace.

"My goal is to provide a solid, interesting and fun place to work, to learn and to grow," he said. "We want brain gain."

Some of Logistics Plus's younger employees gathered in a conference room — where one end of the room is taken up by an air hockey

table — to talk about the company's appeal to the millennial generation.

Central location

"Everyone should put their offices above a brewery," said Mike Callan, 23, with a laugh. Co-workers often gather to unwind at the end of the day at The Brewererie, on the bottom floor of Union Station where the Logistics Plus offices are located.

While that clearly isn't possible, a central location is important to millennials who value walkability, mixed-use neighborhoods, and retail and entertainment options when choosing a place to live, according to a 2015 Urban Land Institute study. GE, Motorola, and Kraft Heinz are examples of companies that have recently moved headquarters from suburban areas to downtown centers, in part to appeal to younger workers.

Kelly Dempsey, 26, lives less than a mile from the Logistics Plus offices and walks to work every day.

"I love being so close to everything," she says. "That's a big selling point for me. I can walk to work, restaurants, where ever I need to be in just a few minutes, and without needing a car."

Job flexibility

Another key attribute in attracting millennial workers: Job flexibility. A recent FlexJobs survey showed 34 percent of millennial workers have quit a job because flexibility wasn't an option, while another 24 percent were seeking a new job because of "work flexibility issues."

The flexibility offered at Logistics Plus doesn't

mean employees are working fewer hours. Instead, they have the autonomy to work the hours they need to in order to get the job done, said Garrett Bowden, 24.

"Right now I'm dealing with customers in Australia and China which means conference calls at strange hours," he said. "But that's part of the job."

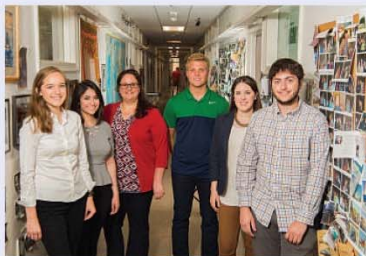
Grein echoed that sentiment, noting she'd sent countless text messages to another co-worker on a recent weekend as the two hammered out a transportation schedule for an international delivery with a tight deadline.

In addition, Logistics Plus has no dress code and a horizontal — rather than vertical — management structure, Grein said. That structure gives workers the opportunity to work in different departments to find their niche rather than be buttonholed into a specific job for years with no room for growth, she said.

"It's unique because there's not a specific hierarchy here," she said. "I don't know right now what my next step will be, but I know there can be a next step. Where you go here is kind of up to you and what you're interested in. You can make your own role."

Berlin said his aversion to micromanaging led to the leadership structure at Logistics Plus. The experiment has paid off, he said.

"I believe in giving people chances to grow, and I've found if you set the right atmosphere and give employees responsibilities, letting them take ownership of their role here, that a lot of them will not just take it on, but excel," he said. "I love watching that happen."



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