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# In Oregon, family-friendly means good business

*A growing number of businesses recognize that their own self-interest is served by policies improving the lives of their employees*

Recent news has been filled with stories about the emerging global economy, fueled by investment capital and requiring competitiveness backed by a well-trained, flexible work force. Yet, there is an untold story behind these headlines—a story offering hope for the health of our community as well as our economy. It is the story of family-friendly businesses.

Despite the "Asian flu," the American economy remains remarkably vibrant. In fact, persistently low unemployment rates in major urban areas have left employers scrambling to find and retain qualified workers. In this regard, certain firms have a marked advantage: They have implemented policies that provide support to their employees as they struggle to balance the demands of work and family life.

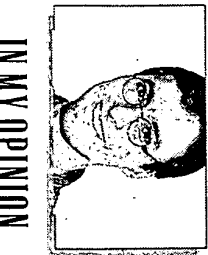
Nancy Mayer's excellent "Trend Watch" article in *The Oregonian* recently highlighted a national survey on this subject. The survey found that 95 percent of adults are concerned that the demands of work cause them to neglect family time. Those surveyed clamored for family-friendly policies—87 percent wanted flexible work hours; 59 percent sought the option of telecommuting, and almost 50 percent desired on-site child care.

Fortunately, here in Oregon a growing number of businesses have recognized that their own self-interest, as well as the good of the community, is served by creating family-friendly policies. These companies are safeguard-

ing their future while improving the lives of their employees.

Portland General Electric is a leader through its "Balancing Work and Family" program. PGE offers a wide variety of policies including job-sharing, paid time off for parental leave and assistance with child care and elder care.

Sequent Computer Systems has consistently been rated one of the top family-friendly work environments. At Sequent, flexible work hours and on-site kindergarten and first-grade classrooms create a culture that is so compelling to families that Sequent relies on it as a major recruiting tool.

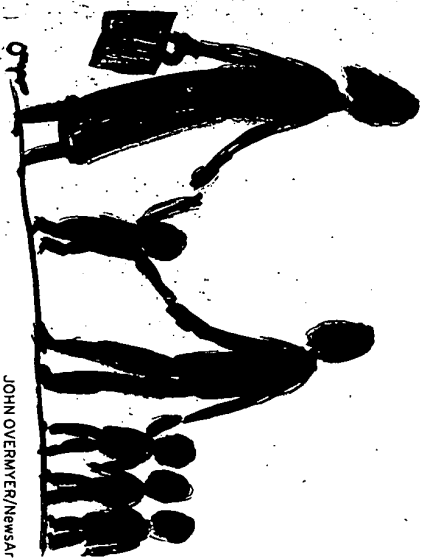


IN MY OPINION  
Jeff Cogen

Legacy Health System maintains three subsidized on-site child-care facilities available to all of its employees. Legacy also has an innovative program that provides loans to Emmanuel Hospital employees who want to purchase homes close to the hospital. After five years of service, the loans are forgiven.

However, it's not just large companies that are blazing trails in providing such policies: Chown Hardware's 60 employees can use a "cafeteria plan" that allows pre-tax dollars to be spent for child care and family health-care expenses. The three employees at the Country Basket, a gourmet gift box business, have an on-site day-care space available for their children.

At O'Neill Pine Company, a seven-employee operation that manages timberlands, employees receive assistance for child care, are paid to volunteer in the community and have personal leave accounts. Company president Rich Pine says his family-friendly practices have proven to be a major competitive advantage for the business.



JOHN O'NEILL/NEWSAFT

The Families in Good Company Awards are an annual recognition of the Oregon businesses, large and small, that have done the best job of helping their employees balance work and family life. The Families in Good Company Awards boost family-friendly businesses by providing them with recognition throughout the state for their path-breaking efforts. This year's award winners will be announced Thursday at a reception at the Oregon Zoo.

For the sake of Oregon's global economic competitiveness, as well as the health of our community, we should all support this exciting trend in Oregon business.

Jeff Cogen is communications director of the Portland-based Commission on Children, Families and Community, a co-sponsor of Families in Good Company, along with Children First for Oregon, PGE and other businesses and government agencies.