

Family-friendly firms honored

In its second year, the Families in Good Company award recognizes businesses with special workplace practices

By MAYA BLACKMUN
of The Oregonian staff

When Pam Knell was approached by O'Neill Pine Co. to be the Salem-based company's operations manager, she said her family couldn't move from Beaverton.

So Richard Pine, president of the timber and property management company, set her up with a specialized phone line, a cellular phone, a computer with e-mail, a fax machine and other equipment so she could work out of her home.

With Pine's support, she took the job, which allows her husband to stay close to his business in Portland and Knell to their 14-month-old daughter as much as needed.

But the support for telecommuting was so overshadowed by the firm's many other family-friendly practices that Knell didn't even mention it when she nominated her company for a Families in Good Company award.

Instead, she listed the company's 30-hour work week, worker-set schedules, paid time for volunteer work, personal leave bank — and many other policies.

All that impressed the judges who honored O'Neill Pine — along with eight other firms — at an awards celebration Wednesday night for the companies' efforts in helping employees meet their needs at work, at home and in their communities.

"At this time in our company, we need mul-

tidimensional employees," Pine said. "I think we're a better business because we're not just what we do at work, because we also fulfill a civic responsibility and have a family life."

Such practices are gaining attention as ways to attract and retain employees in tight labor markets — unemployment in the Portland area is about 4 percent — reduce costs and increase productivity. Pine joked he's happy more employers don't join the trend because it gives his firm a competitive advantage in hiring.

Knowing that work life greatly affects life at home, Children First for Oregon, a state child advocacy group, and the Oregon and tri-county-area commissions on children and families started the Families in Good Company awards. Now in its second year, the program is seen as a way to recognize and inspire workplace practices that are family-

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Richard Pine, president, O'Neill Pine Co.

Awards: Creative approaches are sought out

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friendly and support community involvement.

The other winners got accolades for paying part of their workers' child-care bills, providing child care at staff meetings, assisting with adoptions, sponsoring events for families, and supporting community groups.

In all, 110 Portland- and Salem-area businesses — ranging from six to almost 2,000 employees — entered the competition.

Representatives from the children and families commissions, National Association For Human Resource Management and the awards' main sponsor, Portland General Electric, judged the entries. The judges looked for creative and effective practices and demonstrated leadership in family-friendly policies, said Rose Yuska, awards project manager.

FAMILIES IN GOOD COMPANY AWARD WINNERS, 1998

Family-friendly workplace policies

O'Neill Pine Co., Salem, small firm
Gymnasee Play Program, Lake Oswego, medium firm
Sequent Computer Systems, Beaverton, large firm

Creative and positive family messages in advertising and promotions

Portland Parent newsmagazine, small firm
Annie Bloom's Books, Portland, medium firm
Legacy Health System, Portland, large firm

Investments in the community

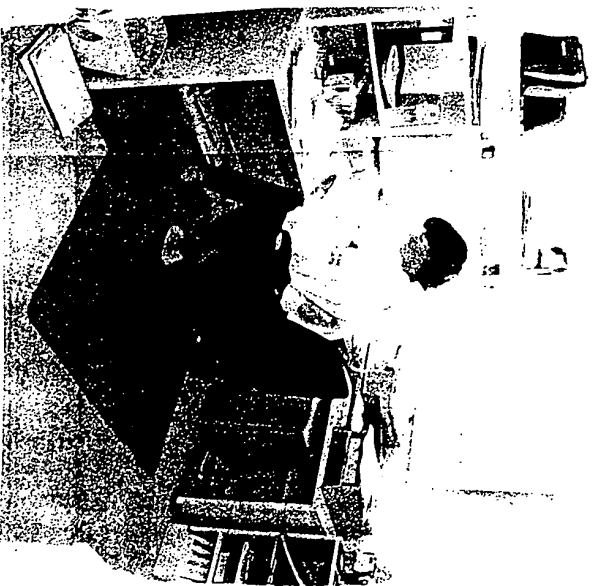
S & J Heating and Air Conditioning Inc., Canby, small firm
Ferguson Wellman Rudd Purdy & Van Winkle Inc., Portland, medium firm
In Focus Systems, Wilsonville, large firm

Knell said she feels lucky to work for an employer that allows her to work only 30 hours a week at a competitive wage, making her the envy of friends and relatives.

"It's pretty cool. I've been happy," Knell said. "Everyone says it's a pretty neat deal."

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Pam Knell is operations manager for O'Neill Pine Co., a Salem-based timber and property management company, and works from her Beaverton home. Her employer's family-friendly work practices garnered the small firm a "Families in Good Company" award.