

# Daily Courier

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## Is your business family-friendly?

### Here's your chance to be first JoCo firm to win recognition for it

By Patricia Snyder  
of the Daily Courier

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Children First for Oregon is now accepting applications for its 2002 Families in Good Company Awards, which recognize employers "who demonstrate community leadership by assisting employees to negotiate work and family responsibility." Family-friendly practices benefit employers, said Marie Hoeven, executive director.

"It actually helps the bottom line," she said. One of the toughest challenges for businesses is to retain quality employees after they are trained, she said. Attractive benefits lead to happier workers. "They're more productive."

Applications are due April 30 for the awards, now in their sixth year. No Josephine County business has even won an award.

Factors the non-profit organization considers include flexible work hours, benefits for families and community support. Of the companies the organization holds up as prime examples of being "family-friendly," all offer some sort of flexible work schedule.

Workers with children may need to adjust their schedules to attend parent-teacher conferences or school events, Hoeven explained. Bonneville Power Administration, a past winner in the government category, allows a start time

of between 6 and 8:30 a.m., so workers can complete a full eight hours and still get home to meet their children after school. Job sharing, allowing employees to work from home and part-time professional positions are other ways an employer can help a worker be there for a family.

Another way companies can help families, without a lot of cost, is to offer educational programs such as talks during lunch hours about how to find quality child care and invest for retirement, she said. Good nutrition, exercise tips, stress management and interpersonal communication skills such as conflict resolution are also popular topics.

"It's a way to support employees who are balancing the stressful demands between work and family," she said. Brochures and support programs for raising children or caring for elderly parents have also been used by award-winning businesses.

Employers can show they care by rewarding employees who volunteer, allowing them to do so during business hours and compensating a certain amount of time.

Hoeven explained that the awards are designed to honor companies that take the attitude they're hiring a member of a family. One company arranges a rafting trip and other outings for employees and their families.

"It's a gesture to employees that their families are important," she said.

Other award-winning practices include medical and dental benefits fully or partially paid for dependents; on-site child care and fitness centers; community programs to learn about the company; eight hours a year to volunteer in a school or attend a game, sharing of banked vacation time and leave for other employees, sabbaticals and life insurance.

Any employer, private, nonprofit or public, with at least three employees is eligible to apply for an award, and the company can use the designation "family-friendly" for two years. Awards will be made June 4, and categories are divided according to the size of the business.

Applications, which combine a benefits profile and short essays, are available at the organization's Web site, [www.childrenfirstfororegon.org](http://www.childrenfirstfororegon.org). Call (503) 236-9754 or write Children First for Oregon, P. O. Box 14914, Portland, OR 97293. Children First for Oregon is the same organization that creates the annual "Status of Oregon's Children" reports, which look at factors such as education, housing, suicide attempts and birth weight to measure the progress of the state and its counties.

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