

## Mind Your Own Business: Most employers plan to give workers some type of holiday gift this year



by **Paula Burkes** Published: December 5, 2016



### Is your employer a Santa or Scrooge?

A recent online poll conducted by the Oklahoma City-based Express Employment Professionals nationwide staffing firm found only 7 percent of employers won't give at least some type of gift this Christmas -- which is an improvement over 23 percent in 2015.

Gateway Mortgage Group employees participate in a Christmas run.

In a separate poll, employees were asked how they wished their company would show appreciation. Among 412 respondents, cash topped that list at 27 percent, followed by Fridays off, 16 percent; employee training and advancement opportunities, 14 percent; movie or event tickets, 12 percent; flexible parental leave or telecommuting days, 8 percent; and massages, 6 percent.

A significant number of workers indicated they simply long for a thank-you from their boss, surveyors said.

"The holidays provide the perfect time for businesses to set themselves apart and attract great talent by recognizing their employees' hard work," Express CEO Bob Funk said. "Regardless of how your business is faring this holiday season, take time to make sure your employees know how much you value and appreciate them," Funk said.

Many employers who made *The Oklahoman's* 2016 Top Workplaces list plan to give gifts to their employees this season. Among winners, who'll be listed in this Sunday's *Oklahoman*, several host annual holiday parties, including Guernsey, Phillips Murrah, GableGotwals, TBS Factoring, R.K. Black Inc., and BKD CPAs & Advisors. Cornerstone Home Lending typically puts on a luncheon (last year it was at Eischen's in Okarche) and talent show featuring employee entertainment, while the Oklahoma Health Care Authority sponsors a decorating contest among units.

The First State Bank gives holiday bonuses and the Anadarko School District, an additional pay cycle at Christmas for certified staff. The Central Technology Center and the University of

Central Oklahoma both offer some 10 days off for winter break, which includes Christmas and New Year's.

My friend Lisa Smith of Boston said her favorite gift from an employer was a dollar scratch card. Another former employer gave her a week's pay and another, takeout Chinese food for lunch the day before the holidays.

Said Susan Bohl, executive director of Okie811, a consistent *Oklahoman* Top Workplace winner, "I love giving at Christmas and giving to the team that helps make our organization great brings me great pleasure. In the past I have given wearables that help also market our mission," Bohl said.

"This year I was able to give a small bonus and will also be giving a wearable. It's in an effort to celebrate our great culture, show appreciation to the team, and thank everyone for caring about safety," she said.

## Top Workplaces lists include 17 newcomers, 13 four-year winners



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Of the 70 companies recognized on this year's Top Workplaces lists, 17 are new, while 13 have made the cut all four years of *The Oklahoman* rankings.

Newcomers claimed three of the 13 spots on the large employer list, including Top Golf Entertainment Group, No. 6; Yukon Public Schools, No. 7; and U.S. Cellular, No. 8.

Among the 17 midsize companies listed, four are first-timers, including Hyatt Shared Service Center, No. 3; Science Museum Oklahoma, No. 13; Airco Service Inc., No. 14; and the Oklahoma Center for Orthopaedic & Multi-Specialty Surgery LLC (OCOM), No. 17.

One quarter of the small-employer winners are new, including top-five performers Cornerstone Home Lending, No. 1; eXp Realty, No. 2; and Burns & McDonnell engineering, architecture and construction firm, No. 4.

Meanwhile, veteran winners dominated six of the 13 large-employer spots, including Paycom, No. 1; Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, No. 3; Ben E. Keith Company, No. 4; Valir Health, No. 5; Whole Foods Market, No. 11; and Southwestern Medical Center, No. 13.

On the list for midsize employers, No. 10-ranked Canadian Valley Technology Center holds the distinction of being the only four-time winner.

And among small employers, there are six that have made the lists all four years: EOG Resources, No. 5; Bank2, No. 13; Oklahoma Water Resources Board, No. 23; Saxum, No. 27; BKD CPAs & Advisors, No. 31; and Oklahoma Arthritis Center, No. 33.

Compared with last year's rankings, the five companies that led in measurable improvements are small employers EOG Resources, No. 5, up from No. 20 last year; NextThought education software technology company, No. 12, up from No. 31; and Advantage Controls, No. 11, up from No. 24; midsize employer Meridian Technology Center; No. 4, up from No. 7; and large employer Paycom, No. 1, up from No. 2.

Specifically, EOG made its biggest strides in the areas of “we do things efficiently and well” and “senior managers understand what's really happening,” 21 percent and 19 percent, respectively.

NextThought did better in “I feel well-informed about important decisions” and “I've not considered searching for a better job in the past month,” 36 percent in both areas.

Advantage Controls rose in “my benefits package is good compared to others in the industry,” 21 percent, and “I've not considered searching for a better job in the past month,” 20 percent.

Paycom improved 28 percent in “My pay is fair for the job I do” and 24 percent in “I feel genuinely appreciated.”

And Meridian improved in “There's not a lot of negativity in my workplace” and “My manager makes it easier to do my job,” 29 percent and 14 percent, respectively.

## Interesting facts about some of the 70 winners of The Oklahoman's Top Workplaces 2016

December 11, 2016

The history of **FirstBank** began in 1901, when the Antlers National Bank was chartered. In 1906, the bank moved to the location where FirstBank in Antlers still operates. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, many depositors of Antlers National Bank were given stock in lieu of their money. Two of those receiving stock were relatives of the present day owners.

The **Metro Technology Centers** Springlake Campus is on the site of what used to be an Oklahoma City landmark — Springlake Amusement Park. This park was opened in 1922 and for more than 60 years, Oklahomans looked to Springlake as a local spot for entertainment, dancing and breathtaking rides, such as the legendary “Big Dipper” roller coaster. On June 28, 1982, Vo-Tech District No. 22 purchased the 95-acre park for \$1.1 million.

CEO Renzi Stone started the marketing communications firm **Saxum** from his living room, keeping letterhead in the linen closet. When choosing a company name, he used the Latin word saxum, meaning “large stone.” A former basketball player at the University of Oklahoma, Stone, at 6 feet 10 inches, is indeed a large Stone.

**Canadian Valley Technology Center** was the sixth “area vocational school” to open in Oklahoma in 1970 with main campuses in El Reno and Chickasha. The school added a third campus near Yukon in 2008 and has since embarked upon a major rebuilding project in El Reno in the wake of a 2013 tornado that destroyed nearly all of that campus.

**Centek Inc.** takes its employees to random drug screens via limousine, and has never had an employee test positive. Employees design their own work areas, lead plant tours, participate in problem solving, root-cause analysis and implementation of solutions. Monthly communication meetings include employee presentations covering safety, quality and improvements.

**Bank2** recently staged a hot dog eating contest that raised more than \$5,000 to help buy a drilling rig for some Ugandan entrepreneurs to be able to drill more water wells. The CEO meets with every new employee, and takes employees to have lunch as part of a weekly event called "Burgers with the Boss."

Since its inception in 1994, **Advantage Controls** has undergone eight facility expansions, increasing its size from 900 square feet in 1994 to more than 100,000 square feet today. Company founder Dick Morris is more recognizable in the Muskogee community — particularly among children — as the Hi-Bi the clown. As part of the Bedouin Shrine clown unit, Hi-Bi has been spreading laughter and cheer since 1973.

**The First State Bank** is Oklahoma's oldest active state-chartered bank. It was founded in 1902 in Canute, where it still operates a branch.

**Cookshack** was founded in 1962 by Gene and Judy Ellis. Gene Ellis built the company's first smoker oven out of an old refrigerator.

**Aerotek Inc.**'s president started as a recruiter, and the CFO started as a business operations associate. Aerotek offers a professional development and training program that includes more than 200 training events, and hundreds of online learning courses.

**Southwestern Medical Center** in Lawton is the oldest hospital in the region, opening its doors in October 1907. It was with the first hospital in Lawton (1907), the first school of nursing (1907), the first operating room (1907), the first ambulance service in the area (1909), the first OB services (1912), the first ICU (1959), the first cancer center (1992) and the first cardiac cath lab (1995).

**BIS** owns a food trailer dubbed Mega Bites, and employees are routinely treated to impromptu meals and parties. BIS also owns a monster military vehicle that will be making appearances in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. In their downtime, team members can play Ping-Pong or various video games.

**Whole Foods Market** supports microlending in rural communities around the world. The company provides a good deal of the funding for the loans and underwrites administrative costs so every dollar donated goes directly to those who need it most. Team members contribute more than \$27,000 from their paychecks each pay period to Whole Planet Foundation, which totals over \$7.9 million to date and has helped more than 230,000 people.

**BKD CPAs & Advisors** has an OK Employee Engagement Council, which evaluates and develops improvements to the firm's policies and programs to promote employee engagement and performance excellence in all areas. Among the developments are a Fitbit wellness program; candid discussion time with the managing partner; co-worker "thank you" rewards, and an anonymous feedback channel.

Founded in 1910, **Boardman LLC** has fabricated many different items including water stock tanks, farm implements, road graders, cotton gin equipment, bridges, anti-submarine net floats, destroyer escort smoke stacks and ventilators for the Liberty Ships, and bomb tail and fin assemblies during the Korean War. Boardman also developed the first "Auto-Page" drive-up book returns for Oklahoma City library patrons.

Working graduates of **Central Technology Center Central Tech** earn an average annual salary \$32,384, 25 percent more per hour than the average person entering the same occupation in this geographic area.

**GableGotwals** is owned by the attorneys who have reached "shareholder" status, so the firm has more than 50 owners.

**Gateway Mortgage Group, LLC** last year hired more than 350 new employees, opened 34 new branches and obtained licensing rights to conduct business in four new states.

**JourneyChurch.tv** was formed on Aug 5, 2001, when Pastor Clark Mitchell, his wife Robin, and 34 others gathered in a living room. Journey Church now has a community of thousands.

**Noria**, an engineering consultation firm, offers training courses in 12 different languages in more than 40 countries.

The **Oklahoma Health Care Authority** was established by the Legislature in 1993. The agency became the single state Medicaid agency in 1995.

The **Oklahoma Water Resources Board** has facilitated more than \$3.2 billion in financial assistance to Oklahoma cities, towns, and rural water districts for water and wastewater improvements while saving those groups more than \$1 billion over conventional financing options. The board manages about 13,000 stream water and groundwater permits that allocate approximately 6.2 million acre-feet of water per year.

Jeff and Tracey Wills owned Canadian Valley Medical Solutions, which was acquired by Walgreens in 2005. They had a five-year noncompete agreement and then later started **OptionOne** in 2011. A large percentage of OptionOne's staff worked at Canadian Valley Medical Solutions and left Walgreen's to work for OptionOne.

**R.K. Black Inc.**, founded in 1952 by Bob and Lorraine Black, just started its 65th year of business. Chris Black, a second-generation owner, started working for the company when he was 10 years old. A third generation of the family now working in the business.

**Russell-Murray Hospice Inc.** provides care to terminally ill patients whether they have a payment source or not.

**Standley Systems LLC** is an Oklahoma-based, family-owned, document management company that started in Chickasha in 1934 as a typewriter sales and service business. It is the only remaining Oklahoma business machine company of that era that has successfully changed with the times and embraced every new technology that has evolved in man's pursuit of faster and more efficient ways to put "ink on paper."

**Star Building Systems** and its parent company, NCI Group, were listed in the 2013 Information Week 500, a list of top technology innovators in the United States.

**TopGolf Entertainment Group** creates more than 150 full-time jobs with benefits at each location, including more than 15 management positions and 2 to 3 golf professionals. Most of Topgolf's food is prepared from scratch daily.

After six months of consecutive employment with the **University of Central Oklahoma**, the school offers a tuition waiver of \$750 per semester, up to \$1,500 per year, to benefited employees and their dependents. The National Weather Service recently renewed UCO's certification as a "StormReady University," recognizing the institution for its established severe weather preparedness procedures.

In June 2015, **VI Marketing and Branding** topped some of the world's largest ad agencies and take home its first National Addy, thanks to its animation and special effects expertise. In 2016, the firm is expected to hit the 70-employee mark.

**Air Assurance Co.** has been awarded the National Comfort Institute's Training Excellence Award, Air Conditioning Contractors Association Jeff Forkers Training Excellence Award and the association's National Residential Contractor of the Year Award, the most prestigious award in its industry. It's been an Angie's List Super Service Award winner several years running and an A+ Honor Roll BBB business several years running.

## Top Workplaces: I love this job because ...

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**Bank2** employees celebrate the Oklahoma City company's Customer Service Week with a "selfie challenge." Employees were allowed to comment on their employers during the surveys that determined which companies would be ranked as Top Workplaces. These are selected comments workers made about why they love their job.

**Addison Group:** We have the ability to control our career and our own desk, which allows us to control our earning potential, as well.

**Advantage Controls LLC:** I have a great manager who actually listens and empowers me to make decisions that are meaningful. He is open and truthful when asked anything.

**Aerotek Inc.:** I am getting amazing training and love the potential to grow financially with a great company.

**Air Assurance Co.:** I feel valued.

**Anadarko School District:** I can guide students toward a bright future, assisting them in college and career choices.

**Bank2:** We have a mission of Building Better Lives, which helps my focus on why we work hard. I feel that I don't just have a job, I am actually helping people.

**BIS:** I am allowed to grow, think, plan, and achieve my goals with assistance from company leadership.

**BKD CPAs & Advisors:** The ability to make decisions without always consulting higher up, flexibility to balance work and personal life, positive attitudes of those around me, longevity of most of the staff locally and in the firm, encouragement to always better yourself and the firm.

**Boardman LLC:** Boardman has a rich history and the employees understand the history and want to be part of something special.

**Canadian Valley Technology Center:** I feel like I make a difference.

**CEC:** I am treated with respect.

**Centek Inc.:** We are a family.

**Central Technology Center:** Central Tech has so many caring people that work together and help each other out.

**Cookshack:** The product I help make is unsurpassed in producing happiness.

**Eastern Oklahoma County Technology Center:** The dedicated people I work with.

**Edmond Public Schools:** Everyone works together as a team for the common good.

**FirstBank:** It allows me to work with some incredible individuals who are like family.

**FTC Transportation, Inc.:** Good equipment, good living and good benefits.

**GableGotwals:** We care about how we obtain the end results for the client. It's a 'we' organization.

**Gateway Mortgage Group, LLC:** My job loves me. I feel appreciated and a part of changing lives through helping people become homeowners. I love the relationships I have built with my branches and the appraisers.

**Guernsey:** I am encouraged to learn new methods of doing things and provided with the training and technology to use these methods.

**Hyatt Shared Service Center:** This is a great place to learn and grow.

**JE Dunn Construction:** We get to do what we love and we have a lot of fun doing it.

**Metro Technology Centers:** I get to fulfill my calling

**NextThought:** I learn something new every day I spend at NextThought.

**Noria:** It's always active and new activities going on.

**OCOM:** The people are great including front line staff to senior leaders.

**Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic:** We help people.

**Oklahoma Arthritis Center:** It is a pleasure to work with people that care to make a positive difference in their employees and patients' lives.

**Oklahoma Department of Labor:** I feel like I'm making a difference.

**Oklahoma Health Care Authority:** It allows me to use my full potential in a positive way.

**Oklahoma Water Resources Board:** I have an opportunity to address water issues and shape policy and regulation for future generations.

**Phillips Murrah P.C.:** There are more perks/incentives offered for the employees than most or nearly all firms this size or larger.

**R.K. Black, Inc.:** I can be creative. I am responsible for what I do but not judged negatively if I make a wrong choice.

**Robert Half:** It gives me the opportunity to coach as well as learn each and every day.

**Russell-Murray Hospice, Inc.:** I am allowed to have flexible schedule and work independently.

**Santa Fe South Schools, Inc.:** I have never felt so needed and so welcomed.

**Saxum:** I feel genuinely valued. I love the people. I love that we're constantly striving to be better.

**Scott Rice:** I get to do what I enjoy and take pride in it and I have flexibility in my schedule to make all my kids' functions too!

**Southwestern Medical Center:** I am doing what I love for a company who values my service.

**Stan Johnson Co.:** The people, culture and flexibility.

**Star Building Systems:** Flexibility to work remote.

**TBS Factoring Service:** I am encouraged to take on new roles & responsibilities.

**The First State Bank:** I feel accomplished when I leave at the end of the day.

**TopGolf Entertainment Group:** I have made friends here.

**University of Central Oklahoma:** I get paid to be around smart people and young people with great potential. I have the freedom to excel and build on my own strengths.

**US Cellular:** Because I'm empowered to provide the service my customers expect.

**VI Marketing and Branding:** We're growing, and I have a chance to grow with the company. The people are awesome. Company leaders only hire people who fit with the culture. We all work hard and play hard as hell. Company owners/leaders are genuinely good people who care about their employees and the community.

**Western Technology Center:** I like the challenges presented and the varied duties.

**Wireless Vision:** I like the team we have and the friendly atmosphere.

**Yukon Public Schools:** Where else would I be able to do what I love and share that passion with my students.

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