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(also available for interview)

40 Companies Win Worldwide Award for Democracy in the Workplace

AUSTIN, TX (April 14, 2009) – Forty companies are the annual winners of the WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces™ award sponsored by WorldBlu, an Austin-based non-profit specializing in organizational democracy.

The announcement came as part of the third annual Democracy in the Workplace Day on April 14th, sponsored by the WorldBlu organization. For-profit and non-profit organizations from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, England, India, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Malaysia made the list from industries such as technology, healthcare, telecommunications, media, manufacturing, aerospace and retail, representing nearly \$12 billion in combined annual sales.

Among the organizations are DaVita Inc.® (the first FORTUNE 500® company to make the WorldBlu List), Great Harvest Bread Company, BzzAgent, 1-800-GOT-JUNK?, Equal Exchange, Continuum, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, BetterWorld Telecom, Hypertherm, Seventh Generation, Chroma Technology Corp. and Menlo Innovations.

“Nothing has proven the need for a new model of business as definitively as the current economic crisis,” says WorldBlu Founder and President, Traci Fenton. “The call for transparent, accountable, and decentralized companies is greater than ever, and in the midst of all the economic turmoil these organizations are a bright spot and a reason for hope.”

Organizations from the for-profit, non-profit, non-governmental and government sectors that have been in operation for at least one full year and have five or more employees can apply for the WorldBlu award.

Company employees complete a survey evaluating their organization’s practice of ten democratic principles, such as transparency, dialogue and listening, integrity, accountability and choice on a leadership, individual, and systems and processes level.

WorldBlu developed the survey tool based on a decade of research into what makes a world-class democratic organization. The WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces™ is a list, not a ranking.

This year’s list contains several organizations that sustained their place on the WorldBlu List for the third year in a row. They are 1-800-GOT-JUNK?, AIESEC International, Axiom News, BetterWorld Telecom, Beyond Borders, Continuum, Equal Exchange, Great Harvest Bread Company, Guayaki, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and TakingITGlobal. Second year winners include BzzAgent, DaVita®, DreamHost, Innovation Partners International, La Siembra Co-operative, MindValley, sweetriot, and Tracer Corporation. A company’s longevity on the list is an indicator of its authenticity and sustainability as a democratic organization.



“Democratic organizations operate on the principles of freedom rather than fear and control,” explains Fenton. “Democratic companies understand that the future of business is less about pomp and more about participation, less about titles and more about meaning, and less about fiefdoms and more about being flat in order to be competitive in this new, democratic age.”

Dave Balter, founder and CEO of Boston-based word-of-mouth media company BzzAgent concurs, “An open and transparent workplace ultimately leads to a successful business. Creativity and freedom of expression are key ingredients for our sustained growth.”

“Hypertherm believes associates who have a strong say in improving the workplace and a strong stake in the results are more productive, take a greater sense of pride and ownership in their work, and are more committed to delivering what is best for the customer,” comments Richard Couch, the President and Founder of the Hanover, New Hampshire-based company.

Mike Ferretti, CEO of Great Harvest Bread Company, headquartered in Dillon, MT, agrees, “Democratic practices are central to our organization because empowered, happy owners run amazing and profitable bakeries. The longevity and success of our company speaks volumes about the value of democratic principles in the workplace.”

“Everyone at Seventh Generation has a voice,” says Jeffrey Hollender, President and Chief Inspired Protagonist of the Burlington, Vermont-based company. “There’s no doubt in my mind that our investment in people and their capacity to contribute to our success is working.”

“At DaVita, we are truly a community first and a company second. We believe that every company can be a community that makes a difference in the lives of all it has the privilege to touch,” explains Kent Thiry, Chairman and CEO of DaVita Inc.®, located in El Segundo, CA. “Our hope is that this approach adds more value to the American health system, not just in savings, but also in transparency and accountability.”

Rob Everts, Executive Director of Equal Exchange, based in West Bridgewater, MA, states, “Some may ask us why we’ve brought democracy into the workplace. To them we ask ‘why have you kept it out?’ Democracy, wherever it can take hold, does not need to be justified.”

WorldBlu List organizations make use of a variety of unique practices that are distinctly democratic and contribute to profitability and high performance.

Brainpark, based in San Francisco, CA, and Generation Think Tank, out of Boulder, CO, both have periodic reviews of their senior management that include the option of removing the company’s leaders if they are not adequately performing their roles.

At Menlo Innovations, based in Ann Arbor, MI, the company encourages transparency, knowledge sharing, and feedback by having each team member share a computer with another team member while they work together on projects. They rotate partners weekly.

MindValley, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and I Love Rewards, in Toronto, Canada both have unique, peer-based systems for motivating their employees. At MindValley, every month each employee is able to distribute 100 points to colleagues that he or she wants to recognize and thank for their contributions. The five people with the most points earn a bonus of 2.5 percent of the monthly profits. At I Love Rewards, the rewards program is called “Pointaholics” and allows employees to redeem awarded points for products or experiences of their choice.



Tracy Wong, Chairman and Executive Creative Director of WONGDOODY, a marketing ideas agency headquartered in Seattle, WA, created and trademarked the company's guiding philosophy of "The Democracy of Good Ideas™", which invites everyone, regardless of title or department, to come up with the next big creative idea.

The employees at Touchstone, a subsidiary of SRA based in Washington, DC, can take advantage of the company's "bubble" structure to tap talent at any level of the company for a project if that person's expertise is desirable for achieving a specific deliverable.

The Grammy® Award-winning Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, based in New York City, is completely conductorless and rotates leadership amongst orchestra members.

Two of the companies not only run democratically, but have also developed software enabling other companies to do so as well. Rypple, based in Toronto, Canada, uses its proprietary software to provide a forum for anonymous feedback from multiple parties. The aforementioned Brainpark produces an "intelligent" software platform that heightens transparency by learning from the social interactions of a company to connect people and resources around relevant tasks.

The headquarters of 1-800-GOT-JUNK?, based in Vancouver, Canada, has an open office design, with an open floor plan, no offices, and the CEO actually rotates workstations depending on availability and convenience. Veldhoen + Company, based in Maastricht, Netherlands, designs engaging, democratic work spaces, which is evident by their own innovative office environment.

Many of the WorldBlu List organizations practice open book management, including sweetriot, in New York, NY, and Nearsoft, in San Jose, CA and Hermosillo, Mexico. Some of them, such as Happy, Ltd., out of London, England, and Srijan, in New Delhi, India, are also transparent about employee salaries. For Glassdoor.com, which hosts an on-line forum where people can anonymously share and review salary levels for thousands of companies, this practice also reflects a central value of the company.

Voting, a common democratic practice used by several WorldBlu List organizations, is found in surprising contexts ranging from FORTUNTE 500® company DaVita Inc.® to Getting Personal, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"Organizational democracy is inevitable," comments Fenton. "The Internet, the demands of Generations X and Y to have a voice at in the workplace, and the Gallup Organization's report that nearly two-thirds of US workers are disengaged at work are causing businesses to rethink their management models and embrace a more democratic style. The companies that choose organizational democracy will lead their industries, boost their bottom-lines, and ultimately build a more democratic world."

WorldBlu has also declared today "Democracy in the Workplace Day" to celebrate these organizations and the positive ripple effects their workplace practices are having on increasing freedom and peace in the world. Individuals are invited to use this day to examine how their workplaces can adopt and further develop their practice of democracy.

On October 21-23, 2010, the WorldBlu LIVE conference will be held in Austin, TX and will showcase select WorldBlu List organizations that will share their best practices and powerful insights about leadership and democracy at work.



WorldBlu is an Austin-based social enterprise specializing in organizational democracy and freedom-centered leadership. Founded in 1997, WorldBlu works to inspire and support the design and development of democratic organizations around the world. For more information, visit the WorldBlu website at <<http://www.worldblu.com>>.

(Note to editors: Ms. Traci Fenton is available for interviews. Contact information is at the top of the release. The complete list of winners follows.)

The WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces™ 2009: (Not a ranking, but a list.)

1. 1-800-GOT-JUNK? – Vancouver, Canada
2. a-connect – Zurich, Switzerland
3. AIESEC International – Rotterdam, Netherlands
4. Axiom News – Peterborough, Canada
5. BetterWorld Telecom – Reston, Virginia
6. Beyond Borders – Norristown, Pennsylvania
7. Brainpark, Inc. – San Francisco, California
8. BzzAgent – Boston, Massachusetts
9. Chroma Technology Corp. – Rockingham, Vermont
10. CommunityLend, Inc. – Toronto, Canada
11. Continuum – West Newton, Massachusetts
12. DaVita, Inc.® – El Segundo, California
13. DreamHost – Los Angeles, California
14. Explore Communications – Denver, Colorado
15. Equal Exchange – West Bridgewater, Massachusetts
16. Generation Think Tank – Boulder, Colorado
17. Getting Personal – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
18. Glassdoor.com – Sausalito, California
19. Great Harvest Bread Company – Dillon, Montana
20. Guayaki Sustainable Rainforest Products, Inc. – Sebastopol, California
21. Happy, Ltd. – London, United Kingdom
22. Hypertherm – Hanover, New Hampshire
23. I Love Rewards – Toronto, Canada
24. Innovation Partners International – Portland, Maine
25. La Siembra Co-operative – Ottawa, Canada
26. Menlo Innovations – Ann Arbor, Michigan
27. MindValley – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
28. Nearsoft – San Jose, California and Hermosillo, Mexico
29. NixonMcInnes – Brighton, United Kingdom
30. Orpheus Chamber Orchestra – New York City, New York
31. Rypple – Toronto, Canada
32. SBTV.com – St. Louis, Missouri
33. Seventh Generation – Burlington, Vermont
34. Srijan Technologies – New Delhi, India
35. sweetriot – New York City, New York
36. TakingITGlobal – Toronto, Canada
37. Touchstone – Washington, DC
38. Tracer Corporation – Milwaukee, Wisconsin
39. Veldhoen + Company – Maastricht, Netherlands
40. WONGDOODY – Seattle, Washington

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