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Georgia Companies Win 2007 HR Excellence Award

Atlanta, GA – September 25, 2007 – Four Georgia-based organizations received the prestigious 2007 HR Excellence Award presented by the Atlanta Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM-Atlanta). Awards were presented during a dinner event at the Carter Center on September 25. The HR Excellence Awards recognize an organization's specific human resource program, practice or process that demonstrates a significant business impact. The 2007 HR Excellence Award winners are IST Management Services, Inc., Aflac Incorporated, Genuine Parts – Automotive Parts Group, and Post Properties, Inc.

Winners selected from the field of entries did the best job of aligning human resource initiatives with their organization's objectives. Specific requirements determined this, including metrics and quantitative results such as a reduction in turnover, higher quality talent pools and other cost-effective results. The internal initiatives – successful training programs for management and interns, employee development and assessment processes – helped establish each HR division as a strategic partner within their organizations.

IST Management Services wins grand prize

IST provides the personnel, software and equipment for on-site mail, copy and technology services for medium to large companies nationwide. The company created unique incentive programs targeted to reduce high turnover within entry-level positions, often filled by candidates referred to as "millennials." The challenge was to make their jobs fun and challenging for this young multi-tasking, high tech, online-centered baby buster generation.

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Hal Blackman, IST president, worked with the human resource and information technology groups to roll out Blackman Bucks Bonanza – a program that rewarded hourly employees with Blackman Bucks for specific achievements: attending management meetings, writing or revising standard operating procedures, obtaining new client accounts, meeting site-specific goals, etc. Employees can earn from \$2 to \$25 and spend their accumulated Blackman Bucks at the company's on-line, three-day auctions that occur quarterly. Prizes are posted on IST's website and typically include home theater systems and gift certificates for airline tickets, hotels and national retailers.

"Measuring the program's results is critical," according to Joe Carroll, vice-president of human resources. "Employee turnover dropped 37% within the first year and continues to improve – saving IST thousands of dollars in recruiting and training expenses. This success was the catalyst behind a new rewards program for employees who work at IST for five years. We hold a lavish dinner and awards ceremony where each recipient receives a gold ring, a service certificate and a bonus."

Aflac reduces turnover and improves customer satisfaction

More than 40,000 phone calls funnel through Aflac's customer service center each day. This is the perfect scenario for creating a stressful environment for customer service representatives – because the callers are usually under a great deal of stress and need immediate help dealing with an illness or injury to themselves or a family member.

When Aflac saw its service center turnover reached an all-time monthly high, the human resource division worked with the customer service center to determine the causes and find a solution. Focus groups were conducted with all levels of employees along with "best practices" research to compare Aflac's service center environment to the overall industry.

Three challenges were identified: pay levels, technology capacity and stress. A new pay scale commensurate with market rates was created, the number of personal days was increased and technology upgrades were made to better serve customers. The results were happier customers and happier service center employees. Turnover decreased 50% and the speed to answer incoming calls dramatically improved. The higher retention levels also kept more service center representatives assisting customers because fewer employees were in training.

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Genuine Parts Company creates management institutes

When the Genuine Parts Company – Automotive Parts Group (APG) introduced the new APG mission, vision and values strategy, the organization needed a forum with managers and other key leadership positions to conduct strategic problem-solving sessions. The organization lacked adequate bench-strength of qualified district manager candidates who could manage its multi-store operations and a consistent method for ongoing recruitment, selection and training for these key field leadership positions.

The company developed a three-year plan to implement Associate District Manager (ADM)/District Manager Institutes. The program placed twelve ADMs in contributing roles with another six in line for promotion to provide bench strength for District Managers. Nearly twenty District Managers are now coaching ADMs and learning to assess competencies and design career development plans.

The initiative focuses on the requirements to operate successful retail stores and brings corporate executives together with field management to evaluate and implement company-wide decisions. In addition to improving results in the financial, technology and store divisions, the new manager institutes created several unexpected benefits: a renewed interest in recruiting, leadership development and succession planning.

Post Properties prepares for the future

Post Properties established a comprehensive intern program with select universities to address impending labor shortages predicted for the near future. The company's objective was to attract high-caliber talent that can advance quickly into management positions – helping to ensure a steady stream of qualified candidates to meet the growth demands of the residential property management business. Post Properties' collaborative approach involved representatives from operations, learning and development, and recruiting to achieve a "best in class intern program."

The internship program expanded from the first year's six interns from two universities to sixteen interns from five universities. Interns accounted for forty leases during the eight-week internship and Post established a credible reputation with the universities for structuring a quality program. Post collaborated with the University of Georgia to make a presentation at the Housing Education & Research Association conference on how to establish and sustain an integrated internship program.

The number of university students recruited by Post has increased in each of the company's markets. Over 95% of 2007 entry-level new hires were college graduates who leased 85 apartments in eight weeks for revenue of \$1.2 million. The internship program will expand into other Post business units for 2008, including development, construction, legal and human resources.

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The Greater Atlanta Area Society for Human Resource Management includes over 2,300 members in the metropolitan Atlanta area representing over 1,500 different companies. Membership spans the spectrum of human resource professionals, from executive and managerial levels to entry-level positions. SHRM-Atlanta is an independently operated chapter of the national SHRM organization. Human resource work groups of any size from Georgia organizations are eligible to compete for the HR Excellence Award.

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