

Area companies, organization recognized for family services

By SHANNON GIVLER, Special to the Local News

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Staff photo by Bethany Stiltner
Jackie Minnis, 4, strikes a pose for the camera as her sister, Stephanie, hands her mother, Betty, a toy piece of bread in the day care center at Vertex Inc. in Paoli.

Two area firms and a nonprofit organization are being recognized as "The Best Employers for Working Parents" by the Delaware Valley Child Care Council.

The awards to Astra-Zeneca, Vertex Inc. and the YWCA of Greater West Chester and Chester County will be presented on Saturday, Sept. 22.

By presenting the awards for the seventh year, the childcare council hopes the selected businesses will serve as role models for other employers in the Delaware Valley, said project director Susan Lundy.

"Not only is it beneficial to the children of these employees who work for companies with programs like flex time and extended family leave," she said, "but it also benefits the employer. Implemented programs like these, which support employees who are parents, help with recruitment and reduce turnover."

Winners are chosen in three different categories based on size: Large with more than 2,000 employees (Astra-Zeneca); midsized, with less than 2,000 employees (Vertex Inc.); and small, with less than 250 workers (the YWCA).

Vertex, a Devon tax compliance software maker, is familiar with working to promote a family-friendly atmosphere in the workplace.

"Life -- not just work," said Jan Mehnert, executive director of human resources. "That saying is up everywhere here. We also feel that it's reflected by respecting our employees and respecting the fact that they have lives outside of work."

Mehnert said the company offers financial planning programs, adoption assistance services, paternity and adoption leave as well as leaves of absences if a family member is terminally ill.

"We also have a new on-site day care technology center for the employees," Mehnert said, "The company funds all the costs for running the center and the charge to the employee is very comparable to

those of similar day cares."

At Astra-Zeneca, the services provided to help families are well utilized, said Lorraine Ryan, spokeswoman and senior manager for corporate communications at the Wilmington pharmaceutical firm.

"We are very pleased to receive this award," she said. "These days it's imperative to attract and retain quality staff. Competition is keen and we are very happy that we can provide these services."

"Just in Time Care" provides emergency child and elder care to employees. And in the case of an extended leave of absence, the company will also pay for 90 percent of emergency child care for up to 10 days. Astra Zeneca also has a shuttle service to accommodate those employees having to travel between its Chesterbrook and Wilmington offices.

Catherine Palmquist, executive director at the YWCA of Greater West Chester and Chester County, said she was surprised an organization as small as hers was recognized.

"We only have two full-time employees, so we didn't think that we were even in the running," she said. "But we were definitely surprised and overwhelmed when we heard that we had won. It just shows that with not too much effort, a company can be supportive of its working parents, and if we can be an example of this, then that is great."

Palmquist described her organization as a "very child/family-friendly environment."

At no charge, an employee of the YWCA can join the "Mother Center Program" as well as enroll children in the YWCA's July/August summer program. Employees who are ill or have a sick child can leave without having their pay docked.

"There isn't really sick-time," Palmquist explained, "the employees are able to leave if they or their children are ill and it's OK."

Winners will be honored Sept. 22 at an event to be held at The Cheesecake Factory in King of Prussia.