

Tampa Bay Times

COMPANY COMMENT

Mosaic phosphate company mines happy employees



Susan Thurston, Times Staff Writer

Friday, April 11, 2014 10:59am

LITHIA — For employees, working at Mosaic isn't just about mining potash and phosphate and turning it into fertilizer.

It's about feeding a growing population and helping farmers reap more food from every acre of finite crop land.

"The world needs us," goes the corporate mantra.

The top U.S. producer of potash and phosphate fertilizer employs about 1,200 people in Hillsborough County, making it one of the largest private employers in the region.

About 400 people work at Mosaic's four-year-old complex in Lithia's FishHawk Ranch. The rest work at manufacturing plants in Riverview and Plant City, shipping facilities in Gibsonton and Port Tampa Bay and an office center near the Alafia River.

The administrative and professional group in FishHawk leads Mosaic's phosphate operations in Florida, where much of the world's supply of phosphates are mined and processed, and Louisiana.

Mosaic designed the FishHawk office center around people and the environment. The four-story building is one of the largest LEED Gold-certified buildings in the area, with electricity-saving lighting, bamboo flooring and countertops made from recycled glass approved by the U.S. Green Building Council. The bright, airy lunch



room overlooks a large pond that's home to ospreys and sandhill cranes. Every employee has access to an onsite nurse and free fitness center.

This year, the Hillsborough hub of Minnesota-based Mosaic ranked eighth as Tampa Bay's top workplace among large employers.

The FishHawk complex brought together employees from six locations in Florida. Over time, that had become logistically difficult for meetings, said Bo Davis, senior vice president for phosphate operations. People knew each other by name but not always by face.

In choosing the site, Mosaic mapped employee home zip codes and found Lithia to be the geographical center. The timing was ideal. The housing crash had stunted the development of FishHawk Ranch, a 3,000-acre community. The developer welcomed Mosaic as a commercial anchor, and many employees now call the neighborhood home.

The staff commutes from as far as St. Petersburg and Orlando. A few work remotely, and some have their children enrolled in the preschool across the street, Kids R Kids.

Each floor of the building has a break room with kitchens, coffee machines and seating. In a nod to its roots and conservation efforts, floors and meeting rooms are named after birds and old phosphate mining towns, such as Pebbledale. Artwork by environmental photojournalist Carlton Ward Jr. adorns the walls.

To help employees adjust to the new digs, Mosaic created the FUN committee, which stands for Formulating a Unified Network. Led by Amber English in the finance department, the 10-member group organizes several events a year to build camaraderie and show appreciation for the staff.

During strawberry season, managers served strawberry shortcake. For Halloween, employees took part in a pumpkin carving contest, and kids from the preschool visited in costumes.

"We want people to get away from their desks," English said.

Once a year, Mosaic hosts family day at Boggy Bottom Event Ranch with food and games. At Christmas, workers collect bikes and toys for needy children.

Mosaic places high priority on community service, whether it's turning mined land into wildlife areas, as is required by state law, or volunteering at local food banks. Employees take part in the International Coastal Cleanup, install oyster reefs in local waters and adopt road medians. Mosaic's barges deliver seawater to the Florida Aquarium every six weeks.

Last year, Mosaic and its recently acquired rival, CF Industries, donated \$2.3 million to United Way organizations.

"One of our core values is connectivity," said community relations manager Christine Smith.

Mosaic also gives employees' children \$10 gift cards to local retailers for every A they get in science, English or math.

The focus on people and community translates to low turnover. The average tenure of an Mosaic employee in Hillsborough is about 18 years, said Sean Butler, the vice president of human resources who has been with the company for 16 years.

For many workers, it's a family affair, with two or three generations working for the company since long before it became Mosaic.

Mosaic was founded in 2004 through a merger between IMC Global, a fertilizer maker, and the crop nutrition division of Cargill. Publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange, Mosaic ranked 246th on the Fortune 500 list last year, with more than \$11 billion in revenue. Overall, it employs 8,900 people serving agricultural customers in 40 countries.

For many of the jobs created mostly through attrition, Mosaic recruits from colleges near and far, from the University of South Florida and University of Florida to Michigan Technological University and the University of Kansas. Many employees, like Farbod Shokrani, come as interns through Mosaic's large student co-op program.

Mosaic hired him as a full-time accounting associate in February after three part-time stints. He says the commute from South Tampa is worth it.

"I get a lot of one-on-one training," said Shokrani, 23. "The managers here really take time out of their schedules for you."

From their first day on the job, employees learn safety comes first. Every floor of the FishHawk building has a point person trained to deal with emergencies and all employees take part in periodic evacuation drills.

Even visitors are instructed to hold onto the hand rail when walking up the stairs.

Susan Thurston can be reached at sthurston@tampabay.com or (813) 225-3110.

COMMENTS FROM EMPLOYEES

... Mosaic cares for the safety of every employee and makes sure we have the tools we need to be successful and achieve our goals.

... I do feel Mosaic makes a difference in world hunger. And my group really cares about the environment in the places we do business.

... I get the support that I need and I get paid well for what I do. There are also many perks for working here and team building is a major focus.

... The work is extremely interesting and challenging. I feel like an important component of a motivated team performing at the highest level of quality and commitment.

... Our mission is to help the world grow the food it needs. It doesn't get any better than that.

Mosaic phosphate company mines happy employees 04/11/14

© 2014 Tampa Bay Times