



# The winners...

## GUNSTER

'Team culture,' Esprit de Corps help to make one of state's oldest commercial law firms a winner

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Law may be serious business, but that doesn't mean it's all work at the Gunster law office in Fort Lauderdale.

One of Florida's oldest and largest full-service commercial firms, with 10 offices throughout the state and more than 165 attorneys and 200 support staff, Gunster knows how to help its employees unwind — including team-building exercises like inter-office bowling tournaments, ice cream mixers, one-night cooking courses, a spirited "best Halloween costume" office contest, and sailing excursions on Biscayne Bay.

"One of the things that makes us unique is our team culture, our Esprit de Corps," says H. William "Bill" Perry, the law firm's managing shareholder. "We look for team players who want a place where it's fun to work."

It's also a place where people *want* to work. Gunster has been named the top workplace among companies with 250 or more employees in the Sun-Sentinel's Top Workplaces awards. Plus, for the fourth consecutive year, *Florida Trend* magazine has named Gunster among the Top Companies to Work For in the state.

"We have a lot of people who, like me, started their legal careers here and have been here for 25-plus years," Perry points out. "And, the same is true with our staff; we have 15 or 20 members who've been here 25 years or more."

Among the reasons why judges voted Gunster No. 1 in this category the Sun Sentinel's Top Workplaces event are the firm's emphasis on community involvement, and the company's dedication to employees' personal and professional development and well being.

At Gunster, employees are seen as more than just members of the law firm; they are members of the community in which they live and work.

The firm encourages employees to become leaders in their communities. "We believe being a professional means giving back to the community."

While the law firm actively supports about a half-dozen philanthropic causes in South Florida — such as Habitat for Humanity in Miami, United Way, Leadership Florida, Junior Achievement of South Florida, the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach, and Museum of Discovery and Science Fort Lauderdale — it encourages employees to also give their time and talents to causes they identify with personally.

"We let people go in whatever direction their interest lies," Perry explains.

The belief is that encouraging individuals to find "a role, placement or niche that is right for them" helps build relationships and leadership skills that benefit both the company and the community, makes for happier employees, and "builds good people."

By "emphasizing a personal fit between leadership roles and what's of most interest to them," the company says, "we find our employees are happier and more enthusiastic about what they are doing."

That personal philanthropy can range from sitting on board of directors of organizations to more passive involvement such as Casual Friday, when wearing jeans to the office comes with the price of a cash contribution to a worthy cause selected from a list of causes nominated by employees.

Gunster also affords employees opportunities to grow profession-

ally. From mentoring opportunities and tuition reimbursement, to Continuing Legal Education (CLE) opportunities and education retreats, various development tools are available to all firm employees.

"It doesn't matter what your position is in the firm," Perry notes, "we believe in giving you the tools needed to pursue your chosen path. We want our employees to be able to advance to their highest ability."

Healthier workers also mean happier workers, and Gunster takes an active role in encouraging employee wellness. It provides a variety of programs, from contributions to health savings accounts, to weight management programs, and discounts on gym memberships and incentives for getting annual physicals.

In fact, Gunster was named one of the Healthiest Employers in South Florida by the *South Florida Business Journal*; an award the law firm also received in Jacksonville and in Tampa.

One of the law firm's most interesting wellness initiatives is Destination: You, a 12-month physical activity program in which individuals wear accelerometers that automatically logs their activity and downloads "credits" to the individual's account. Once employees achieve specific milestones, they are rewarded with raffles for gift cards, discounts on health insurance premiums, paid time off and certificates of recognition.

The goal is one million steps for each individual. At about 2,000 steps per mile, that's 500 miles of walking. Some individuals have logged over four million steps several months shy of the one-year mark.

Professional development, personal growth and satisfaction, and wellness initiatives: it's all part of the "Gunster experience."



Health initiatives, sponsorship of physical activity and community involvement are all part of the 'Gunster experience.' From top: law firm employees participate in a health fair, the Mercedes Benz Corporate Run in West Palm Beach, and a Habitat for Humanity project in Miami. (Photos courtesy of Gunster)