

Investing in People

GE Healthcare does more than just talk about diversity

Story and photo by Griselda Aldrete



It's an increasingly common catchphrase among business leaders these days: "We want to encourage a more diverse work force." The leaders of GE Healthcare, a \$17 billion unit of General Electric with 46,000 employees worldwide, say they're all for it, too.

What sets GE Healthcare apart, however, is that they put their money where their mouth is.

The company, which has its global headquarters for clinical systems in Wauwatosa, has since 1997 spurred the formation of employee groups for Latinos, blacks, Asians and women. These groups, in turn, help with the recruitment and retention of minority talent.

The company does more than encourage these employee groups. It gives them budgets in the thousands of dollars range and urges them to plan and execute an array of projects, such as the recruitment of fellow minority talent, mentoring programs, and valuable community work. Best of all, they're allowed to do this on company time.

One employee group is the GE Hispanic Forum, which has 180 members at its Wauwatosa-based branch.

"GE finds value in its employees," says Alfredo Arguello, a manager for diagnos-

tic imaging sales and Hispanic Forum leader. "It creates a network where we can take quality time to grow people, create opportunities and as a result make GE a stronger company."

Jeannette Cazares, an IT program manager and group co-chair, agrees. She says the forum plays a critical role in attracting, developing and promoting Hispanic talent within the company.

It's a model for work force diversity that seems to be working.

GE Healthcare was named "Best Diversity Company" this year in the health care field by the readers of Diversity Careers. Also this year, Essence magazine named GE the eighth-best company for multicultural women.

And while the company doesn't keep track of how many Hispanic employees it has (it never formally asks that question), several employees say that few Hispanics leave the company once they are in.

So how does it work?

Every month, 18 committee leaders for the Hispanic employee group meet to plan projects like mentoring programs and brown bag lunches between Hispanic employees and top company officials.

The group also holds networking

events to identify and recruit up-and-coming Latino professionals, and it partners with schools like UW-Madison and the Milwaukee School of Engineering to find recipients for scholarships and company internships.

Community service is key

But it's not just about helping GE Healthcare. The Hispanic Forum, like all of GE's employee groups, makes community service a major part of its work.

An example is the "A Healthy Me, A Healthy You" program launched last fall to raise awareness about the dangers of childhood obesity. The forum partnered with La Casa de Esperanza, UMOS, Mexican Fiesta, ProHealthcare and the YMCA to get its healthy message across to the community.

So, should other companies develop similar employee groups?

Arguello definitely thinks so, since what emerges from the process are "employees that are satisfied with what they do...and leaders ready to take on new challenges and risks."

And, Arguello adds, "all of these people have something in common: They are all great leaders who happen to be Hispanic."