



Downtown Economics

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Ideas for Increasing Economic Vitality in Community Business Districts

Valuing Downtown Employees

Milwaukee's Successful Downtown Employee Appreciation Week

The daytime employee population is a very important market segment for many downtowns. These employees, typically office workers, can generate significant sales for downtown businesses while solidifying downtown's lead role in the regional economy as a place of expertise and a place of interaction. Many downtown districts are faced with the challenge of acquainting employees with nearby retail, dining and service establishments. Showing appreciation for these employees is one way to connect with them and make them feel part of the broader downtown community.

Downtown Employee Appreciation Week

Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 in a partnership with downtown stakeholders and community business leaders has developed a nationally recognized program that highlights the perks of working and owning a business downtown.

Begun by Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 in 2006 as a business retention and recruitment initiative, Downtown Employee Appreciation Week mirrors a "spirit week" with special events, office challenge games, musical competitions and discounts at local businesses to rally downtown Milwaukee's 78,000 employees. Downtown Employee Appreciation Week not only rewards the lead contributors in the local economy, but also elevates downtown Milwaukee's image as a great place to conduct business. The mid-summer event builds camaraderie among the downtown workforce and showcases the city's amenities.

"Cities whose downtowns are prosperous generally see a ripple effect of prosperity in the entire region. Downtown Employee Appreciation Week is a chance to reward our lead contributors in the downtown economy," said Beth Nicols, executive director of Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21. "From our elected officials to downtown property owners and HR directors, this event recognizes the downtown

workforce for making Milwaukee a great place to conduct business," said Nicols.

Chase Tower at Water and Wisconsin is one example of a property rallying its tenants. While the 22-story high-rise has been the presenting sponsor and home base for many Downtown Employee Appreciation Week activities, including the event's opening and closing ceremonies, the building owner have taken additional steps to coordinate tenant appreciation events exclusive to their tenants during the event. "Downtown Employee Appreciation Week mirrors our goal of providing best in class service to the tenants at Chase Tower at Water and Wisconsin. We are pleased to serve as presenting sponsor and are exciting about all of the downtown employees who will be in and around our building during the week," said Michelle Berliner, vice president, Brookfield Real Estate Opportunity Fund.

Activities

Downtown Employee Appreciation Week activities are as follows:

Opening Ceremony - The event starts with an Employee Appreciation Week Opening Ceremony. The ceremony has included live music, games, giveaways and lunch for the first 1,000 downtown employees. Invited guests have included the Mayor and other local officials.



Office Challenge Games - Office-themed challenges rotate through the downtown area. Prizes are offered for each challenge. Challenges include: Dunk the Boss, Steno Chair Relay, Mouse Pad Fling, Grand Prize Game, Rubber Band Shoot, Office Rock Star and a Milwaukee Bucks Basketball Shootout. Downtown Employee Appreciation Week Passports are available at challenge locations. Participants who travel to three or more challenges and have their passports stamped are eligible for downtown prizes.

Daily Giveaways - Throughout the week, giveaways are distributed to the first 1,000 downtown employees at Chase Tower at Water and Wisconsin. Items are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Downtown Activities - A number of downtown competitions that showcase athletic and musical ability are held throughout the week. Highlights include:

- Downtown Volleyball Challenge
- Dancing With Downtown competition
- START! Walking Downtown program by Milwaukee celebrities
- World's Largest Coffee Break
- Downtown Battle of the Band
- Downtown Idol competition
- Iron Chefs of Downtown – Mystery Box Challenge
- Downtown Employee Extreme Makeover Reveal
- Milwaukee Bucks Basketball Shootout; and
- Office Rock Star karaoke competition

Wear Your Paper Clip - To reward employees, various downtown businesses offer discounts and complimentary items or services. Employees are requested to sport a paper clip during Downtown Employee Appreciation Week to identify themselves as a downtown employee. The paper clip serves as the official "ticket" in redeeming discount offers.

Closing Ceremony - The week culminates with the Downtown Employee Appreciation Week Closing Ceremony. Final contestants from the week's challenges are put head-to-head. The event is topped off with giveaways and the Employee Appreciation Week passport drawing.

Conclusion

This innovative program won the Outstanding Achievement Award in Special Events and Promotions at the 2007 International Downtown Association's 53rd Annual Conference & World Congress in New York.

According to Beth Nicols, executive director of Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21. "Downtown Employee Appreciation Week is a very unique event, yet replicable for other downtown organizations looking to implement business retention and recruitment initiatives.

Other downtowns, large and small, may want to consider such an event as a way to build a sense of community among the daytime population. The camaraderie that develops benefits both employees and employers and signals to others that downtown is a vibrant place to do business. By creating a sense of community for employees, downtown can further distinguish itself from suburban office parks while increasing its appeal in business expansion and recruitment efforts.

Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21 is an organization established in 1998 to support the interests of the downtown Milwaukee business community. Created through private sector leadership, Milwaukee Downtown is a management district organization that oversees 120 blocks representing approximately 400 property owners in the center of downtown Milwaukee. The organization funds specific initiatives aimed at creating a clean, safe and friendly downtown.

* This article is from a material prepared by Rachel Wezek of Ellingsen Brady Advertising. For more information, visit www.milwaukeedowntown.com/iworkdowntown.

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