

# It's all in the extended family at Keystone Environmental

**M**any companies strive for a sense of family among staff, but **Keystone Environmental Ltd.** goes the extra distance. The Burnaby, B.C.-based environmental consulting firm, which has projects across Canada, makes a real effort to recognize its staff in a number of different – and fun – ways.

One is the tenure awards, handed out at the annual Christmas Party to employees who achieve 10, 15, 20 and 25 years of Keystone service. To come up with the best rewards, the company contacts their family members or significant others to find out what the employee would value most. “We enrolled one employee in a race-car driving school in Phoenix, Arizona,” says President Raminder Grewal.

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**Ray Bertani**  
Chief Operating Officer

Typically, the reward is an experience, not a product. “We've sent several families to Disneyland and other family-friendly destinations,” adds Grewal. “One employee was given tickets for two to Hong Kong so he and his new wife could visit his grandmother, who had been unable to attend his wedding.” Keystone believes it's important to include the families and/or significant others in these rewards to make them more meaningful and promote the company's extended family philosophy.

Socializing the team is a priority at Keystone: there are regular staff-appreci-



RAMINDER GREWAL, PRESIDENT OF KEYSTONE ENVIRONMENTAL LTD., WITH STAFF PARTICIPATING IN A FOOSBALL BATTLE ROYALE

ation and personal-development lunches, in-house yoga classes, monthly birthday cake parties, celebrations of Cinco de Mayo, Diwali and Lunar New Year, and several annual events to which spouses and children are invited. “At Keystone Environmental, employees are not a number,” says Chief Operating Officer Ray Bertani. “They're a name, they're a face – they're part of our extended family.”

Zahra Pirani, a project engineer with Keystone since September, is impressed by how welcoming and collegial the company is. When she joined, Keystone was facing a tight submission deadline, and many people were putting in long hours. “Raminder was really supportive of all of us,” she recalls. “Of course, he was working on the submission too. But noticing that people were spending more time at the office, he

would bring in food for them throughout the week. It was a small gesture but it means a lot to people who are putting in a lot of hard work to know that they are being recognized.”

Pirani also appreciates the company's open-door policy – senior management is very accessible. “It makes you feel like you're part of a team and that they value your opinion, which is huge.” Keystone recently established an innovation committee, of which Pirani is a member, so that staff from all departments and at various levels can offer input about how to do things better.

Another plus for Pirani is the overall sense of camaraderie. During the big push in the fall, she says, “when people would finish their own work, they wouldn't just say, ‘I'm done,’ but would go out of their

way to see if they could help others. It felt like everyone had everyone else's back.” And she says the firm gives back to the community, participating in initiatives such as Movember, Bowling for Big Brothers and raising money for the Union Gospel Mission and other local charities.

Keystone, which gives employees annual bonuses and matches their RRSP contributions, is committed to promoting from within. In fact, Grewal – who started with the company in 2000 as a junior field engineer – says its goal is “to one day get to the stage where we only hire entry-level employees and just continue to move everyone up through the ranks to fill more senior positions.” The company provides numerous in-house training opportunities and ensures employees get regular feedback about their progress toward career goals.

The company is undergoing a period of growth and has recently completed renovating and expanding its office space, which also gives them access to a very large patio. Grewal and Bertani – along, no doubt, with their staff – are looking forward to many outdoor lunches and barbecues and more opportunities to celebrate the Keystone family. ■

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