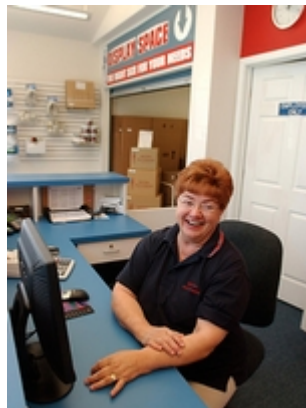


A company whose employees vie to be the best

Performance rewards include cash, kindness

By EDWARD L. KENNEY, The News Journal
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Charlotte Tackett is site manager at Sentinel Self Storage in North Dover.

#2 - SENTINEL SELF STORAGE

What organization does: Provides commercial and household storage solutions.

Global revenue: N/A

Delaware headquarters: 800 First State Blvd., Wilmington

Web address: www.StoreAtSentinel.com

Founded: 1989

Employees in U.S.: 32

Delaware employees: 31

Sentinel Self Storage stores valuables for people. But the company also values its people, and that's what helps make it one of the Best in the Business.

One way it does that is to treat its 32 employees like one big family.

"We are a family-owned business, so I think we put a lot of emphasis on family," said Amelia Julian, a managing family member and vice president.

"We try to create a workplace where employees are excited about their job and they are rewarded for a job well done," she said. "They enjoy what they do, so it doesn't necessarily feel like work."

What employees do is provide "a clean, state-of-the-art store with excellent customer service" at the company's 10 locations, she said. Another site is under construction. A combined storage space of about 550,000 square feet houses everything from furniture to extra clothing to boats and cars.

"People store everything," Julian said. "If they're moving, they store household items. Contractors will often store their materials. Homeowners will outgrow their homes. We get a lot of college kids that store over the summer."

Charlotte Tackett, 66, site manager at a storage facility in north Dover, sells customers locks, boxes, tape, packing material and other moving supplies. She has been with the company about five years, having retired from AstraZeneca five years prior to that, and said she is glad she extended her career with Sentinel.

"They're very understanding with any personal situations," Tackett said. "They're always there for you, and you don't feel like you are pressured by them when you're already under pressure."

The company's working conditions and its good balance between home and work life helped it rank second overall in the small-business category.

Julian said employees are rewarded for doing good jobs, and the company's sites vie with each other to be the best. One competition among employees is the effort to meet collection target levels for customer payments that are past-due.

"We don't send out monthly bills," said Tackett, whose job also includes making collections. "I'll call them and tell them, 'This is just a friendly reminder. You can avoid a \$15 late fee.'"

Employee rewards are mostly monetary, but not always, Julian said.

Rewards for good performance and formal training to help employees grow on the job also ranked high in the company's rating.

Some companies let their new employees learn on their own, but not at Sentinel, Julian said. For the first several weeks after joining the company, an employee is teamed with a veteran employee to help learn the job.

"We put a real emphasis on training, because our employees are truly an asset, and if they're the best then we are the best," she said.