

YORK COUNTY

Wagman empowers, educates employees

Construction firm wants workers involved in politics

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A York County construction firm is getting kudos for doing something many companies shy away from — getting employees involved in the political process.

In late May, G.A. & F.C. Wagman Inc. of Manchester Township received a Pride Award from the American Road & Transportation Builders Association. The business

was recognized for its Grassroots Committee, a group of employees that works to educate other workers about political issues and voting.

The six-member committee, formed in 2004, includes employees of G.A. & F.C. Wagman Inc. and Wagman Construction Inc., which also is based in Manchester Township. The committee gives workers — not just executives — the chance to help shape policy, said Lisa Wagman Glezer, public-relations manager for the Wagman companies.

“Politics isn’t just an executive’s responsibility. It’s everyone’s responsibility,” Glezer said.

The committee uses several tactics to help employees become more politically aware. Among them:

- Offering voter registration forms, absentee ballots and information about polling locations and

election Web sites

- Hosting meet-and-greet sessions where employees can interact with politicians and candidates

- Offering a resource center with educational materials, such as information about candidates and news briefs

- Providing breakfast to employees on election days

The Pride Awards honor projects that help enhance the image of the transportation construction industry among the public and media, said Jeff Solsby, spokesman for the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, which is based in Washington, D.C.

“What really made that project stand out is that (Wagman) took a very strategic approach to getting employees involved,” Solsby said.

Although it is difficult to determine how the committee’s work has affected voting habits, there are signs that it is influencing employee behaviors, Glezer said. More than 90 percent of office employees are registered to vote. Employees sent hundreds of postcards to Gov. Ed Rendell protesting his decision to take money reserved for road construction and shift it to mass transit.

Many companies, especially those with government contracts, have programs to get their workers politically involved, said G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster. Madonna said he expects workers’ interest in politics to increase substantially because of the excitement surrounding this year’s presidential campaign.

“We are seeing unprecedented interest in the presidential election by all sorts of groups of people,” Madonna said. “I think we’re going to have a record turnout for modern times. This is one of those huge elections that comes along every so often.”

Getting employees to become more politically aware should be a goal for companies, said Melissa Washington, human-resources director at JPL Productions in Swatara Township, Dauphin County. Washington, who takes her 9-year-old son to the polls every time she votes, said employees should receive the same encouragement.

“We don’t have a program right now, but it’s a great idea that we should look at,” she said.

Other companies are more wary.

McKonly & Asbury, an accounting and business-consulting firm based in Cumberland County, includes some information about candidates and policies in a newsletter it sends to clients. But the firm shies away from a formal program of civic education, said Jim Rodgers, the firm’s marketing director.

“We certainly encourage people to be civic-minded, but we try to maintain impartiality when it comes to politics,” he said.

Programs such as Wagman’s are generally beneficial, as long as they don’t make employees feel forced to adhere to a particular set of political beliefs, Madonna said.

The Grassroots Committee’s goal is to inform employees, not strong arm them into particular positions, Glezer said.

“We want to them to get involved, and that’s our primary objective,” she said. “We don’t force anyone to do it.”

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