



Springfield Business Journal holds a variety of awards programs throughout the year, but Best Places to Work is unique because it requires employees to nominate their own company for recognition. Instead of simply trading their time for a paycheck, these employees realize that their work is serving a larger purpose and they feel valued and appreciated for it, thanks to the culture created by the company's leadership.

As you peruse the profiles of this year's Best Places to Work on the following pages, you are bound to notice some common themes. From new employees to seasoned ones, entry level to management, there is a shared purpose and vision. Perhaps hearing their stories will inspire you to think about how you might improve upon your own workplace culture.

Our event sponsor, United Community Bank, hosts a reception and awards ceremony that is open to the business community. We hope you will join us in recognizing the 2023 Best Places to Work.

PLEASE JOIN US AS WE HONOR THE 2023



Reception & Ceremony
Thursday, May 18, 2023
5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

United Community Bank, Montvale
1900 W. Iles Avenue, Springfield, Illinois

Please RSVP by Friday, May 10th
To Michelle at Springfield Business Journal
Email: info@springfieldbusinessjournal.com | **Phone:** 217-726-6600 x 139

American Metals Supply Company



PHOTO BY JOSH CATALANO

American Metals Supply Company is a family-owned business founded by Al Hassebrock in 1962. Hassebrock left his sales job at a building materials distribution company in order to begin his own sheet metal sales company. After a year, his former employer began sending sheet metal business to him, even going so far as to pen a letter to their customers endorsing Hassebrock and his company for sheet metal needs. Hassebrock framed that letter, and it hangs on the wall in the lobby of the home office to this day.

In 1971, Al's son, Steve Hassebrock, entered the family business and currently serves as the company's chief strategy officer. In 1990, Steve Hassebrock opened a second location in St. Louis, thus expanding the footprint of American Metals Supply into new markets outside of central Illinois.

Steve's daughter, Chrissy Nardini, ushered in the third generation when she was named the company's chief financial officer in 1997.

In 2006, Nardini became president of the company, and since that time, American Metals Supply has added seven locations in the Midwest and Southwest, now employing 150 people in 12 states.

"We are a leading wholesale distributor of sheet and coil steel, prefabricated duct and fittings and a complete line of HVAC products," Nardini said. "Since 1962, we have focused on providing top-quality products and service to our customers."

American Metals Supply operates on four core values. According to Nardini, the company's No. 1 core value is a commitment to improving employees' lives. "We care deeply about our employees and care about creating a culture they can thrive in," she said. Other core values are best-in-class performance, striving to be a partner to customers and vendors, and being disciplined and numbers-driven.

The company boasted a number of accomplishments in 2022, including an

anniversary for a branch in Texas. "We had our first full year of being open with a branch in Austin, Texas, and that branch was one of our quickest branches to achieve profitability," said Nardini.

Looking into the future, American Metals Supply Company plans to continue expanding geographically while staying in its niche of galvanized steel and HVAC supplies.

Nardini is proud to work for American Metals Supply, and feels the employees and customers are the most important focus. "Helping solve our customers' needs and knowing we are making a difference for our employees is very rewarding," she said. "We had two long-term employees, one of more than 40 years and one 20-plus years, who both retired at the end of 2022. When they describe their careers at American Metals as life-changing, and they retire with over \$1 million in their 401(k), it is the best reward I could ask for."



Conn's Hospitality Group



PHOTO BY JOSH CATALANO

Conn's Hospitality Group started in 1948 with Roy Conn's first Springfield restaurant, Roy's Café. More than seven decades and many ventures later, Roy's son, Court, his wife, Karen, and Court's sons, Casey and Adam, are now in charge.

The family runs operations that include the Inn at 835, Conn's Catering & Events, Obed & Isaac's Microbrewery & Eatery, Wm. Van's Coffee House, Merchant House, Li'l Willy's Smokehouse BBQ, Elkhart Hill Farm & Vineyard, Elkhart Station General Store and Vinegar Hill Mall. Each business is in a different historic home or building that has been restored by the Conn family in Springfield, Peoria and Elkhart.

The Conn's Hospitality Group corporate offices are located in the DeWitt Wickliffe Smith Mansion at the corner of Second and Cook streets. The building was constructed in 1865 and has been home to offices and other entities. "It has been many different restaurants through the years, and renovations have started to bring this building back to its former glory," Karen Conn said.

Court Conn began to oversee most aspects of his father's businesses during the late 1970s, eventually becoming primary owner of Conn's

Catering in 1985. Karen joined him in 1986 and became a primary owner in 1996. The new partnership soon found a historic downtown apartment building that they converted to a bed and breakfast and named the Inn at 835.

"The Inn houses 11 beautiful guest rooms with the charm of a former era but with all the amenities of a 21st-century hotel," Conn said. The Inn at 835 is on the National Register of Historic Places as well as being a designated Springfield landmark by the city of Springfield.

On Feb. 12, 2012, after several months of renovation, the Conns opened Obed and Isaac's Microbrewery and Eatery. "This date was significant because it was Abe Lincoln's birthday. The microbrewery has since exceeded all expectations," Conn said. The menu for Obed and Isaac's was developed through thoughtful research by all members of the family and their travel around the United States. "Some old family recipes grace the menu, like Papa Conn's famous chili. The family's philosophy toward all our businesses begins with attention to detail and excellence in service," she said.

In June 2018, the Conn family purchased 30 acres of the Old Gillett Farm in Elkhart. The 1868

home, seven barns, water tower and caretaker house have been transformed into a working orchard, vineyard, apiary and event barn, all in the legacy of the Conn family.

Even the pandemic didn't slow the Conns down as during the summer of 2020 they entered the smoked meat industry. Li'l Willy's Smokehouse BBQ came to life on the corner of South Grand Avenue and MacArthur Boulevard in Springfield. "This former filling station is now a bright spot on the iconic corner in town," Conn said. All meat is smoked on site daily, and a wide range of traditional sides are offered.

Next came the purchase of the old Vinegar Hill Mall complex during the summer of 2021. "Vinegar Hill Mall is unique in that it offers many different business opportunities in a historic setting a block away from our state Capitol," Conn said. With the Conn family's recent purchase of this property, clean up has begun on the exterior of the building as they work to revitalize the space.

Conn said the company believes in setting their team up to be the best they can be, and they are always looking for ways to make things better for their team and the company.

Kuhn & Trello Consulting Engineers



PHOTO BY JOSH CATALANO

Kevin Kuhn and Michael Trello began Kuhn & Trello Consulting Engineers in 2013. They are principal engineers of a veteran-owned small business that partners with other companies who have the same values.

"We started this company with the intention of creating a working space that we wanted to go to every day," Kuhn said. "A place that cultivated team work, allowed for creativity and mistakes, and allowed for some fun." The company has the collective expertise to fulfill a myriad of roles in the areas of structural engineering, working with municipalities, surveying, transportation, land development and hydrology.

Along the way, Kuhn & Trello Consulting Engineers has been fortunate to attract like-minded people who believe in the culture of the business. "We started the company with four employees and we have grown to 20," stated Kuhn. "And we would like to continue to add to that total."

Kuhn & Trello Consulting Engineers is committed to providing exceptional, quality work while remaining professional and ethical. Employees are highly engaged in the community by fostering health, education and safety. "We strive to make decisions that benefit the team members. A happy team is a good team," Kuhn said. "Today we have a business that is family-oriented, team-based and is as fun as work can be."

Kuhn is proud to be recognized as one of Springfield's best places to work. "The team took it upon themselves to nominate us. What more can be said?" Kuhn said. The team is by far the greatest part about working for the company. "We allow the team members as much responsibility as they want to carry and the freedom to make decisions. It's got an easy-going vibe."

Over the past year, Kuhn & Trello Consulting has achieved a number of accomplish-

ments. "We celebrated 10 years of being in business," Kuhn said. "We have also landed several projects that will help our long-term sustainability." The company has goals for the future in order to keep moving forward and remain successful. But none is more important than maintaining a quality workforce. "We want to hire people who can thrive in a team environment with lots of personal freedom," he said.

Kuhn & Trello is proud to enjoy a high volume of repeat business and satisfied clients, and according to Kuhn, that is the direct result of the exceptional group of people who work for the company. "We are small enough that a client effectively gets our whole team, which means the skill set of each team member impacts a lot of projects," he said. "The workplace vibe is energized, collegial and – best of all – far removed from a buttoned-down, corporate office."



MJ Kellner Foodservice



PHOTO BY JOSH CATALANO

MJ Kellner Foodservice is a locally-owned broadline foodservice distributor, founded in 1920 by Maurice J. Kellner. The company currently employs 100 individuals in the Springfield area, and delivers more than 23 truckloads of product each day.

"We have everything a commercial kitchen needs to operate," said Christine Novaria, director of human resources. "Our foodservice division sells to restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals and schools within a 125-mile radius of Springfield. We also have a contract division that focuses on providing foodservice goods and services to prisons, mental health and veteran's facilities on a contract basis in multiple states."

Bill Kellner, the company's third-generation owner, didn't have a fourth generation to carry on the family legacy, so he initiated an Employee Stock Ownership Plan in 2021. "This is at no cost to our employees and is a very generous retirement benefit for us to look forward to and work hard for every day," Novaria said. "Bill Kellner trusted his employees so much that he made us the fourth generation of owners."

MJ Kellner is a family-oriented company that believes each individual makes a difference.

"Employees are provided with opportunities to shadow different departments, sit with different individuals and gain insight into how operations flow from desk to desk, to warehouse, to trailer, to customer and finally to your plate," Novaria said. "Our foundation provided by the Kellner family is one of stability and trust. It is hard to put into words how great of a benefit being an ESOP-owned company is for the employees, our families and our community. Knowing we each have a second form of retirement that doesn't cost us a dime of our take-home pay is truly a gift."

One key element that keeps employees happy is knowing they are working as an integral part of the supply chain that provides food to the community. Whether it is nourishing patients at local hospitals, providing healthy lunches to students, being at the center of a milestone event like catered weddings or simply an evening out with friends or family, MJ Kellner employees are proud to be part of each moment.

For Novaria, celebrating personal and work victories is one of the best parts of the job. "I also get to support them when things don't go as planned or when life takes an unfortunate turn,"

she said. "I love seeing how departments can turn on a dime, pivot to serve the customer and work together to exceed the customer's expectations."

Over the past three years, MJ Kellner has experienced a vast amount of success. During the pandemic, the company had no lay-offs, maintained its business, supported the customers and also had exceptional growth. The company became 100% employee-owned in 2021 with the Employee Stock Ownership Plan. The next year, the company's brand identity was refreshed with a new logo and tagline to solidify its place in the community, and MJ Kellner also experienced a record year in sales.

The future of MJ Kellner is bright, according to Novaria. "We have been ramping up the next generation of leaders to learn from our long-tenured employees," she said. "There is much institutional knowledge in the food industry, and it is certainly a relationship business. Yes, we sell food, but our No. 1 focus is our service. We work every day to ensure our people are cross-trained, given the opportunity to see how the entire operation flows, and most importantly, to understand our values and instill what has made and continues to make our business successful."

Kerber, Eck & Braeckel



PHOTO BY JOSH CATALANO

Kerber, Eck & Braeckel LLP (KEB) was founded in 1931 by Louis J. Kerber and Albert O. Eck Sr., certified public accountants who opened offices in Springfield and St. Louis, Missouri. In 1938 Walter E. Braeckel joined the firm, and the company now has five office groups in three states.

"KEB cares deeply about its employees and the community that has contributed to its success," said Travis Davis, senior manager. "The core values of KEB are not just lip service or posters hanging on a wall. They truly represent the culture of the firm."

Recently, KEB wrapped up its 90th Anniversary Give Back Campaign. One of the goals of this anniversary year was to give back to the community. "To celebrate, employees were encouraged to volunteer our time, resources and talents to support nonprofit organizations of our choosing," Davis said. "Whether it's sponsoring recreation-league sports teams, providing time and resources for professional development or hosting happy hours to celebrate our accomplishments, the firm does its best to support and grow its employees."

KEB management understands that an organization's culture is crucial in both serving customers and serving each other. The culture at KEB is one of service and appreciation. "Employees

all know what is expected of them and know that their work is recognized and rewarded," said Drew Thomason, consulting manager. "That attitude carries over into every interaction with each other and with customers."

The company understands that the employees play a major role in what makes KEB successful. They have various office events throughout the year, ranging from baseball games to golf outings and visits to local wineries.

"My favorite part of working for KEB is the people, both my co-workers and the customers we serve. It is obvious that my co-workers are united in our purpose and take joy in being the best team we can be. Our customers can see that and put their trust in us," Thomason said.

"KEB is focused on providing great services to its clients and knows that it needs to focus on maintaining a healthy and happy workplace for its employees," said Sara Jaeger, manager of accounting services. "I also enjoy the variety of client services that we provide. This ranges from payroll, to monthly bookkeeping, to just answering client questions when they come up."

There is a team culture at KEB. Jaeger constantly sees how her department plays an integral part with the audit and tax departments. They rely on

each other for information and can discuss and share their thoughts and ideas with each other to better serve their clients.

In 1999, KEB added asset management to the list of services provided with the creation of an affiliated entity, KEB Asset Management.

"KEB is a great place to work because it is the perfect mix between a big and small firm," said Nathan Townsend with KEB Wealth Advisors. "The partners know who you are, and everyone knows the names of everyone else. However, KEB has the resources and capabilities of bigger firms, where the partners may not know everyone's name," he said.

"I enjoy the fact that everyone at KEB wants to give back to the Springfield community, from the longest tenured partner to the newest employee," Townsend said.

KEB's goals are to continue to increase client base, both bringing in new clients and providing new services to existing clients. The company is also focused on recruiting the future generation of KEB and retaining the current staff by maintaining a diversified and positive work environment.

"KEB wants to continue doing what it has been for over 90 years – help guide our clients to success," Townsend said.



United Community Bank's Best Places to Work in Central Illinois

United Community Bank is pleased to bring our community the Best Places to Work awards program. Since 2008, in partnership with the Springfield Business Journal, UCB has presented over fifty companies with this honor and hundreds more have been nominated by their employees. Included on these pages is a look back at a decade of distinction.

2023



2022



2021



2020



2019



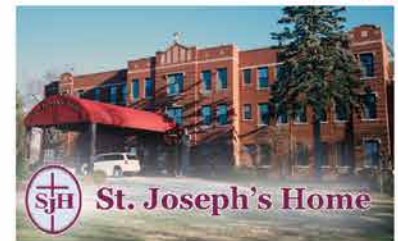
2018



2017



2016



2015



2014



For a full list of past recipients please visit: ucbbank.com/bptw