

NKU works to support employees' dreams



BY LUCY MAY

Keeping a large and diverse work force satisfied is no easy task, but for James Votruba it's worth it.

Northern Kentucky University President James Votruba knows he can't make all his employees happy. He has 1,063 full-time and part-time faculty members and 1,047 full- and part-time staffers to worry about, after all.

Still, Votruba gives it his best shot.

He makes a point of meeting with every new faculty and staff member soon after they're hired and tells them the university is "devoted to advancing the dreams of both our campus and our community," he said in an e-mail interview.

"I quickly add that I know that they have dreams as well and that I hope that NKU can support their dreams whatever they may be," Votruba said. "My aim is to have every one of our staff members experience important and satisfying work while at the university. We can't bat 1,000, but we can have this as our target."

That focus on meaningful community engagement and Votruba's approachable style were among the factors that helped earn NKU recognition as one of Greater Cincinnati's Best Places to Work in the Business Courier's annual program, announced late last year. The university was a winner in the "Grand Companies" category of 500 or more employees.

Being judged by employees as a great place to work is especially challenging for a university, said Todd Uterstaedt, president and CEO, Baker & Daboll Executive Coaching in Mason.

"When you're dealing with the faculty, in particular, you've got a very large number of exceptionally smart individuals whose cognitive intelligence is tremendous," Uterstaedt said, but they don't necessarily apply what



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NKU President James Votruba meets with every new faculty and staff member.

he called their "emotional intelligence."

"It takes a patient leader," he said.

Votruba, president at NKU since 1997, said he believes faculty and staff morale is high because those employees know they're doing important work that impacts both the university's nearly 15,000 students and the community.

"Our employees see the university as deeply engaged in advancing the economic and social progress of the region," he said. "Far from being a citadel on the hill, we're a campus that is fully engaging the major challenges confronting our region. I believe they are proud of this community engagement."

And NKU's focus on students makes everyone on campus feel they're making an important difference every day, said Lori Southwood, NKU's director of human resources.

"You really are making a difference in this community because the students who come through here make a difference in the community," she said. "It's rewarding to see that. Even if you're in a role that doesn't deal directly with students, you feel it here on campus."

WORKING AT IT

As a Best Places to Work winner in the Grand Companies category, announced late last year, Northern Kentucky University has a lot of people to keep happy. Here's a breakdown:

Employee type	Total	Male	Female
Faculty full-time	579	296	283
Professor	106	72	34
Associate professor	119	70	49
Assistant Professor	132	65	67
Lecturer	121	53	68
No academic rank	21	10	11
No faculty status	80	26	54
Faculty part-time	484	216	268

Tenure status - Total full time faculty

Status	Total	Male	Female
Tenured (35%)	200	124	76
One tenure track (21%)	120	65	55
No tenure track (31%)	179	81	98

Source: NKU At A Glance 2006

Employees' comments in the Best Places to Work program reflected that.

"NKU is truly an exceptional organization with engaged leaders trying to do things right while focusing on the right things to do," one employee wrote.

And another commented: "I feel very fortunate to be part of building the future for the region."

For his part, Votruba spends a lot of time talking to employees to ask how things are going. And every five years the university updates its strategic plan with a process that includes asking employees whether NKU is still a good place to work and why.

"Great organizations have the capacity to attract and retain outstanding talent. Talented people have options, which means that organizations must compete based on both professional opportunity and quality of work life," Votruba said. "Universities are no different. At NKU, we expect to win in the competition for talent. So far, we win a lot more than we lose."