

BEST PLACES TO WORK

Charter Communications Inc.

Category 5
3rd

BY BRIAN PING

Meet Eric Ketzer. By day, he's a process analyst for Charter Communications, running documents and doing other behind-the-scenes tasks for the cable giant. When the sun goes down, he trades in his pen for a guitar pick and jams the night away at one of several St. Louis night spots.

It didn't always happen this way. "I left a major competitor to work with Charter because they're more willing to work with that schedule," Ketzer said. "It was a significant priority for me to be able to have that flexibility to do the music. There are no conflicts at all."

In fact, the nation's third-largest publicly traded cable operator, with more than \$6 billion in 2007 revenue and led by CEO and President Neil Smit, encourages that special talent and recently found a way to showcase it.

Earlier this year, Charter employees from across the nation took part in a "Battle of the Bands." Fourteen groups participated, with four finalists being invited to the company's headquarters in West County for a March 3rd showdown. Ketzer's ensemble, The Frontline, won. Their prize is an all-expense-paid trip to New Orleans to perform at an upcoming cable industry convention, with the proceeds going to help fund the city's rebuilding efforts.

Company executives point out that worker satisfaction isn't limited to time spent off the job. Lynne Ramsey, senior vice president of human resources, said individual performance in the workplace is duly rewarded.

"It doesn't take five layers of bureaucracy to make a decision here," Ramsey said. "You're held accountable for your decisions, and you can really make a difference. I think you can see that in the employees."

Advancement is another retention tool. The company implemented a career path for broadband technicians, who can earn a promotion every six months

by meeting benchmarks. Chris Solis, who has moved up the ranks to become a fourth-level broadband technician (out of a possible five), expects a long future with Charter.

"It's a company you can definitely grow with," he said. "I had no experience. Never knew anything about it. I just put my mind to it, expressed that I want to learn everything, and they helped me with all the training."

Despite an increasingly difficult economic situation, company officials said employee morale at Charter remains high. A company employee survey showed roughly two-thirds of its 16,500-member work force indicated it wishes to stick with the employer for at least five years or through retirement. Ramsey said this stability will help the corporation survive in an uncertain future.

"There's going to be a talent shortage," Ramsey said, referring to the overall U.S. job market. "You're seeing a shortfall in the number of qualified people in the (age) category of 35 to 44. So, how do you fill that gap as individuals retire? We make sure that we remain competitive from a compensation and benefits standpoint."

Perhaps no perk is more valuable to Ketzer than the ability to maintain a part-time music career while holding down his day job. It should come as no surprise. You can also find Charter Chairman Paul Allen moonlighting as a rock musician. In fact, his band plans to take the stage alongside Ketzer's in New Orleans later this spring.



Eric Ketzer (right) enjoys the flexibility Charter provides for him to continue his part-time music career.