

# Thinking way outside the box

West Liberty Foods opened its own fully functional, state-inspected, off-site child-care facility for employees and have received nothing but accolades.

BY ANDY HANACEK, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



**Andy Hanacek and Muriel Bingham discuss the play areas set up for the children in West Liberty's Hearts & Hands Children's Academy.**

**O**ften, a company in a competitive situation needs to think creatively to stand out as an employer of choice in a tough market area.

West Liberty Foods, of West Liberty, Iowa, had built a brand new processing plant in Tremonton, Utah — a region loaded with respected, established, large businesses that would pose serious competition to West Liberty in recruitment and retention of quality employees. Furthermore, West Liberty wanted to demonstrate its long-term commitment and dedication to the region.

With those factors in mind, West Liberty stepped outside its comfort zone to offer a truly unique benefit to its employees in the area — a company-owned, company-operated, off-site child-care facility, the first licensed child-care facility in the city of Tremonton.

Hearts & Hands Children's Academy was opened to West Liberty Foods employees in July 2008, designed to bolster the recruiting program to attract workers who may not have been employed due to child-care challenges. The center provides care for children 6 weeks of age through 12 years old. It was also designed to be a retention tool, as children's participation in the program is reliant on their parent/guardian's employment with West Liberty Foods.

"Research has demonstrated those employees who have reliable child-care are

# 2009 HREVOLUTION AWARDS



(Front row, l to r) Wayne Wiggins (*The National Provisioner*), Brent Jackson (Ameritas Group), Muriel Bingham (Hearts & Hands Children's Academy) and Tara Lindsay. (Back row, l to r): Dave Frett, Patti Haltiner (Hearts & Hands), Jean Bonham and Ed Garrett.

more productive, have fewer absences and display a higher level of satisfaction with their jobs than those facing the challenge of unreliable childcare," Tara Lindsay, director of human resources for West Liberty Foods, explained on the company's HREVOLUTION entry form.

To start the process, West Liberty fully renovated a 102-year-old, unused church in town, maintaining the church's historical presence and grandeur.

"The stained-glass windows were donated by various families from the community over the history of the church," Lindsay said, "and we felt maintaining this historical perspective was an important consideration during our renovation process."

West Liberty also made the decision to take the academy beyond simply being a babysitter-style day-care center, says Muriel Bingham, director of Hearts & Hands.

"We do a lot of learning through play," she says. "So we don't do a lot of memorizing and making them sit and write stuff.

"We do a lot of things hands-on and through playing —

even with the two-year-olds."

In terms of the center's success, several indicators already have pointed at the academy's success. First, parents — who, remember, are West Liberty employees only — have given the center glowing remarks, as have state inspectors, who have even requested using Hearts & Hands as an example of a state-of-the-art child-care center.

Furthermore, West Liberty has found that word travels around town quickly, and has fielded multiple requests from the public to open the center to non-West Liberty employees.

Lindsay and Bingham take pride in receiving those flattering queries, but say they are mindful of the ultimate goal of the center, which is to bolster the company's recruiting and retention efforts.

**WLF** West Liberty Foods.

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