

Restek Volunteerism Thrives at Inaugural Culture Fair

Local organizations set up alongside employee groups at Restek to speak with employees about volunteer opportunities.



For new employees such as Ravali Alagandula, an LC applications scientist, the abundance of volunteer opportunities at Restek is exciting, but knowing where to start can be tough.

Employees at the chromatography manufacturer can use up to four hours per month to volunteer during work and, at a company with more than 350 local employees, opportunities abound.

To help employees new and old better understand the opportunities available at Restek, the company hosted its first Culture Fair on Oct. 4 and invited more than 20 groups and organizations to set up an info booth within the company's atrium and hallways to talk to employees about how they could get involved.

Alagandula, who was hired just over a month ago after receiving her PhD in clinical and bioanalytical chemistry from Cleveland State University, signed up to help Restek present at STEM fairs at local elementary and middle schools and with Centre Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM), a group that advocates for the medically underserved living or working in Centre County.

"Everyone is so friendly. It's easy to approach them and learn about the opportunities," Alagandula said.

One of those friendly people was Pam Decker, a senior graphic designer at Restek, who staffed the booth looking for volunteers for 4thFest, the county's renowned annual 4th of July celebration.

"Dozens of Restek employees help out during 4thFest each year and we're hoping to get a few more today," she said.

To encourage employees to speak with a lot of different groups, Restek distributed passports to be signed by booth staffers. Employees with at least 10 signatures were entered to win one of three gift cards.

"Volunteerism is part of Restek's culture, and we're hoping this fair spreads that engagement even further," Karen Davis, a Restek HR representative, said.

The event was spearheaded by the Restek Owners Culture Committee (ROCC) with the goal of increasing the number of employees who volunteer by offering an easy way for them to learn more about the opportunities that are available within both the company and the community.

"There are a lot of people constantly doing things and recruiting volunteers—we thought a culture fair like this could help employees get a good overview of different organizations and how they can get involved," said Denise Kyle, a sales coordinator at Restek, who leads the Employee Owners Communication Team (EOCT).

The idea was brought to the attention of the EOCT by Mike Shuey, Restek's international customer service supervisor, after attending an ESOP conference and seeing another company doing one. Restek, like thousands of companies in the country, is an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) company, which is a business model where the employees own shares of the company. In Restek's case, the company is 100% employee owned.

"It seemed like a great idea, and I'm looking forward to seeing it grow each year," he said.

The fair was held in October to help celebrate ESOP Month. The company also plans to host a number of other celebratory activities, including educational seminars, a Halloween costume contest, and a presentation by State Representative Kerry Benninghoff (R-Bellefonte). October 15 is also Restek's 32nd anniversary of serving top-notch chromatographic innovations to the analytical community.

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