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**CAREER & WORKPLACE**  
**2015 BEST PLACES TO WORK**

## 2015 medium company, second place: Lilliput Children's Services

Companies with 50-249 employees



Lilliput Children's Services, a nonprofit adoption agency in Citrus Heights, works with kids and families at a stressful time in their lives. Employees need to feel nurtured in the workplace if they are to effectively serve the families, said CEO Karen Alvord.

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By Robert Celaschi – Correspondent

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Lilliput Children's Services, a nonprofit adoption agency in Citrus Heights, works with kids and families at a stressful

time in their lives. Employees need to feel nurtured in the workplace if they are to effectively serve the families, said CEO [Karen Alvord](#).

“Everything we do, we try to build in humor and fun,” she said.

When Lilliput decided to pursue national accreditation, a lot of institutional knowledge had to be put on paper. The staff created a castle theme with avatars of each employee as they worked toward quarterly goals. They fitted Alvord with “armor” at a staff meeting. When accreditation came through, the staff celebrated as a team.

“I always have this overwhelming pride when I tell people where I work and what my agency does,” said [Victoria Jungling](#), a field administrative coordinator. “Even as much as we have grown, this agency has managed to maintain a family-type culture.”

Lilliput pays 100 percent of the cost of employee health insurance, which includes acupuncture and chiropractic services.

On work anniversaries, a supervisor will take the employee out to lunch. On birthdays, the executive staff hand-writes a card.

“Little things like that, it blows my mind,” said [Michelle Echavarre](#), a program supervisor.

Lilliput recently paid for the entire staff to spend a day at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom.

“People had been asking, ‘When can we do a picnic with our families?’ It was nice because it was asked for, and Karen responded,” Echavarre said.

Lilliput puts a premium on transparent communication, up to the executive office and back down again. Each

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month the staff gets an update from Alvord on any changes or new plans for the agency's 15 offices around the state. At one staff meeting last year, she gave a detailed presentation on the budget, complete with real dollar figures.

Employees are encouraged to point out when someone has done something outstanding – called a “bravo” – and those become the basis of nominations for Lilliput's annual Gulliver Awards in multiple categories.

“We really work hard to hire the right people and reinforce the culture,” Alvord said. She knows the culture well, having gone to work for Lilliput as a social worker right out of graduate school in 1989.

Lilliput uses the StrengthsFinder assessment tool as part of the screening for anyone coming in at a supervisory level. Skills can be taught, Alvord said but Lilliput wants people who already show the ability to set aside issues of power and control and be collaborative.

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### **The Essentials**

- Top local executive: Karen Alvord, CEO
  - Local employees: 50
  - Total employees: 140
  - Describe your company culture in five words: “Genuine, fun, bold, fulfilling, partnership.”
  - Steps leaders take to create a great work environment for employees: “Thank them. Hire excellent people, immerse them in our culture, give them the necessary resources, and get out of their way. ... Minimize rules. Maximize expectations. Celebrate successes.”
  - How being a Best Place to Work affects your bottom line: “It is our hope that recognition as a Best Place will help us to recruit and retain even more dedicated staff.”
- Karen Alvord, *Doni DeBolt and Rod McAllister*