

Attracting and Retaining Staff in the North

The 60-room Kikiwak Inn in Opaskwayak Cree Nation is the only 3 ½ star Canada Select hotel in northern Manitoba. It continues to be successful for a number of reasons, one being its ability to attract superior staff.

“Our chef is a good example of how we attract people,” says Jack Lane, General Manager of the hotel. “We offered him a three-year contract which allowed him to get financing to buy a home. His contract also requires that he keep food and labour costs in line and meet a certain percentage at which point he receives a bonus.”

The advantage to the employee is some job security and motivation to do well. For the employer, it means less time spent training new people if they can retain good staff. An added bonus to the Kikiwak and the community is that the chef has his Red Seal certification allowing him to train others.

Finding ways to attract and keep employees can be a challenge for any business but when you are located in a town north of the 53rd parallel, it can be even more difficult. Lane believes that making the right package available, such as the one created for the chef, helps to do more than bring in staff, it can attract excellent staff.

The northern location, however, can be played up for the many individuals who are drawn to the lure of the north. Lane says the chef had been up north working elsewhere and loved it. That made it even more appealing to him and his family when the Kikiwak offered him the contract.

“We have some staff in different departments, including housekeeping, the dining room, and maintenance, who have been here since we opened,” Lane says. “If they are local people, they may be more likely to stay but the lifestyle in the north attracts other people, too.”

All 60 + Kikiwak employees enjoy a variety of benefits, whether they are full or part-time. These include prescription glasses, dental, and extended health care. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, staff receive a turkey courtesy of the hotel. It’s an added touch that helps say thank you to the employees. A Christmas staff party and family party are among the ways the hotel helps build and foster camaraderie among the employees.

The Kikiwak supports employees who want to improve their work and professional skills through evening courses. If an employee wants to take additional training, for example, a computer course at night school, the hotel will cover the fees once the employee has passed the course. It’s a win-win for everyone since the employee increases his or her knowledge and the hotel can benefit from that enhanced skill base.

“We also like to promote from within the hotel. Our front desk supervisor started in the gift shop on a part-time basis, worked in housekeeping and the dining room, and now is a supervisor,” says Lane.

The future continues to look promising for the Kikiwak Inn. Owned by the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, it is an important part of the community and as each thrive, they help support and enhance the opportunities for each other.

The Kikiwak Inn is an emerit Certified Property as well as a MANITOBA BEST property.