

Dominican Hospital named family-friendly employer

SANTA CRUZ -- Dominican Hospital, the third largest employer in Santa Cruz County, is a winner of the 2010 Family Friendly Workplace Awards.

The recognition comes from the United Way of Santa Cruz County Success by 6 program and the Santa Cruz County Breastfeeding Coalition.

The Success by 6 program has been presenting the awards since 2003 to highlight the importance of family-friendly policies to help parents ensure their youngsters enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

Santa Cruz County parents say their No. 1 concern is balancing work and family, according to Kymberly LaCrosse of the United Way. The benefits of family-friendly policies to employers are employee retention and fewer absences from work.

Other employers recognized this year are: Goodwill Industries, Community Action Board, Special Parents Information Network and Santa Cruz SPCA.

Both Dominican Hospital and the SPCA were recognized for workplace support for breast-feeding, which has been found to prevent childhood illnesses such as ear infections as well as save families money.

"As a working mother of two, the hospital supports in many different ways my ability to work and have a family at the same time," said Sabrina Michaelis, human resources manager at Dominican, which has close to 2,000 employees.

Michaelis, 40, who has two sons, ages 7 and 5, nominated the hospital for the award.

She cited the ability to have a flexible schedule, tax-saving

options for child care expenses, paid time off that can be used if her children get sick and "superior" health care benefits that give her peace of mind.

"On occasion I brought my child in while I work," she said, adding that when she worked in the software industry before joining Dominican six years ago, employers were "not as family-focused."

For nursing mothers, there is a lactation room where working moms can express milk in private, something mandated by AB 1025 in 2002, as well as breast-feeding support groups.

Other employers that won the award also were praised for policies that support working parents.

Brenna Ewing nominated the SPCA of Santa Cruz, where she works an educator. She said her supervisor was very supportive of her choice to breastfeed her children for the first year.

"I have been allowed six months to bond with my babies and be a huge part of their early lives, which is extremely important as a mom," she said. "I was allowed to hire a temporary employee to fill my shoes for the six months I was gone. My position was held for me until I returned."

Lara Love, a projects coordinator at Gemma, nominated the Community Action Board.

"When my 5-year-old is sick, I can take time off without question or regret," wrote Love, who is a single mother. "When child-care issues arise I can bring him to work with me where he is made to feel welcome. There are toys to play with in the office for him, his name has been written on the in/out board, and he has an inbox' of paperwork that he considers his work' when he comes to the office."