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**** Embargo: April 24, 2008 00:01 AM EDT****

25 Companies Win Worldwide Award for Democracy in the Workplace

ATLANTA, GA (April 24, 2008) – Twenty-five companies are the annual winners in a “Worldwide Award for the Most Democratic Workplaces” competition sponsored by WorldBlu, Inc., an Atlanta-based business specializing in organizational democracy.

The announcement came as part of the second annual Democracy in the Workplace Day on April 24th, sponsored by the WorldBlu, Inc. organization. For-profit and non-profit organizations from the US, Canada, the Netherlands and Malaysia were selected from industries such as technology, healthcare, telecommunications, media, manufacturing and retail, representing nearly \$8 billion in combined annual sales.

Among the organizations are DaVita Inc., (the first FORTUNE 500® company to make the WorldBlu List), Great Harvest Bread Company, BzzAgent, 1-800-GOT-JUNK?, Equal Exchange, Linden Lab (makers Second Life), Pandora, DreamHost, Continuum, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, MindValley, and BetterWorld Telecom.

"The WorldBlu List seeks to shine a spotlight on the companies pioneering the next generation of business," says WorldBlu Founder and CEO, Traci Fenton. "The ego-driven, command and control business model is officially dead. WorldBlu List companies represent the future of work."

Organizations from the for-profit, non-profit, non-governmental and government sectors that have been in operation for at least one full year and have five or more employees can apply for the WorldBlu award.

Company employees complete a survey evaluating their organization's practice of ten democratic principles such as decentralization, accountability, transparency, integrity and choice on a leadership level, individual level and systems and processes level.

WorldBlu developed the survey tool based on a decade of research into what makes a world-class democratic organization. The “WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces” is a list, not a ranking.

This year's list also contains several organizations that sustained their place on the WorldBlu List for the second year in a row. They are 1-800-GOT-JUNK?, AIESEC International, Axiom News, BetterWorld Telecom, Beyond Borders, Continuum, Equal Exchange, FBS Data Systems, Great Harvest Bread Company, Guayaki, Linden Lab, Motek, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and TakingITGlobal.

“Democratic workplaces operate on the principles of freedom rather than fear and control,” explains Fenton. “Democratic companies understand that the future of business is less about pomp and more about participation, less about titles and more about meaning, and less about fiefdoms and more about being flat in order to be competitive in this new, democratic age,” explained Fenton.

DaVita Inc., located in El Segundo, California, is the first FORTUNE 500® company and first healthcare company to make the WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces. It is the largest independent provider of dialysis services in the US, with over 1,300 clinics and 30,000 employees. DaVita® practices organizational democracy through regular “Town Hall” meetings and at its quarterly “DaVita Voice of the Village” meetings where “teammates” can ask any question to the CEO and senior leadership. Also, each year the company’s CEO and COO share their successes and failures in front of more than 2,000 teammate leaders. Teammates are also regularly asked to vote on various new practices and all of the 1,300 individual clinics are empowered to develop their own set of rules and guidelines, decentralizing power by allowing each clinic to be its own boss.

Kent Thiry, CEO of DaVita says, “We challenge our teammates to behave in the company the way they would behave in their neighborhood. I firmly believe that every company can be a community. And I know it’s worth it!”

Equal Exchange, located in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, is owned and governed by their employees on a one-person/one-share/one-vote basis, without regard to seniority or rank. Employee-owners also elect the Board of Directors and hold six of the nine seats.

Dreamhost, headquartered in Los Angeles, is a web hosting company where they use email discussion lists almost exclusively to make critical business decisions, practicing full transparency so that every voice is heard and decisions are made with everyone’s best interests in mind.

The Grammy® Award-winning Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, based in New York City, is completely conductorless, rotating leadership amongst orchestra members.

At Great Harvest Bread Company, headquartered in Dillon, Montana, they have designed their franchise model with more than 200 stores across the US using a “freedom franchise” approach, a method they developed in to order to nurture creativity, excellence and a true sense of ownership.

At Pandora, an Oakland, California-based personalized online radio service with more than twelve million listeners, they decentralize leadership, empowering all employees to make decisions with the fewest people necessary, while Innovation Partners International in Portland, Maine prides itself on rotating all leadership roles on a regular basis, from president to CFO.

King Arthur Flour in Norwich, Vermont and sweetriot, based in New York City, practice employee-ownership and open-book management, respectively, common practices in most democratic workplaces.

At San Francisco-based Linden Lab, makers of the highly successful Second Life® online virtual world, key company data is openly shared in real-time on flat-screen TVs and employees are encouraged to choose their own work based on company objectives. Their “A&Os,” or Achievement and Objectives platform, is a weekly self-reporting tool where each employee shares with the company via email what they will work on that week and what they accomplished the previous week. Their “Distributor” tool is a points system where employees pledge on projects they believe will be of the greatest benefit to the company or to people who deserve them. Employees can show appreciation for one another by “sending love” through their “Love Machine” software application.

“A democratic workplace is simply more effective,” states Dallas Kashuba, CEO of Dreamhost. “When everyone has a chance to be a part of the decision-making process, the decisions made are more universally accepted. We can spend less time managing and more time doing what we do best. Open lines of communication within the organization also lead directly to better communication with the customer.”

Dave Balter, founder and CEO of Boston-based word-of-mouth marketing company BzzAgent explains, “Openness and transparency are not only hallmarks of democracy, they are also bellwethers for successful businesses. Today’s consumer has countless opportunities to voice his opinions about brands and companies. Shouldn’t employees have that same right?”

“Creating the world’s largest junk removal service is completely in alignment with being recognized as one of the world’s most democratic places to work,” comments Brian Scudemore, Founder and CEO of the \$126 million company 1-800-GOT-JUNK? “To ensure our organization is a world-class working environment, we focus on employee engagement through our open-office concept to create alignment and trust with our employees. We know that our steady growth and customer satisfaction relies on our ability to carry out these democratic processes.”

Linden Lab’s Founder and CEO, Philip Rosedale, believes organizational democracy allows a company to be more innovative and tap the creative talent of their people. “In order to meet the unique challenges we face as the creators of the virtual world of Second Life, we strongly believe in the wisdom of the crowds because, often times, our issues are larger than any one person can solve on their own. We truly believe that distributing the decision-making makes us a stronger, more agile enterprise.”

Organizations wanting to attract and retain top talent, boost innovation, and harness the full potential of the next generation workforce can take their cues from democratic organizations. “At Guayaki we are pioneering a new business model that demands creative solutions. We find that through democratic practices we all bring our whole selves to the process and that elevates the quality of our decisions,” stated Chris Mann, CEO of Guayaki in Sebastopol, California.

Tim Westergren, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer at Pandora agrees: “There’s nothing more potent than a talented, motivated employee who feels respected and empowered by their company. They are happier and more effective, plain and simple. That’s what a democratic workplace means to us.”

Ann Price, Founder and CEO of the software firm Motek in Beverly Hills, California agrees. “Motek’s strong culture enables us to attract and retain incredible people. It’s an incredibly fierce advantage.”

Workplace democracy isn't only happening in the US. A notable stand-out on the list is MindValley, a self-funded Internet company based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with 25 employees from 17 countries. MindValley's CEO states, "Most companies end up killing brilliant people. We had to tear down our ideas of what an ideal company is and give them room to build their own company culture. Along the way, our own blend of organizational democracy emerged, and we ended up bending the rules of business in a few crucial ways."

“Organizational democracy is inevitable,” comments Fenton. “The Internet, the demands of Generations X and Y for meaningful work, and the Gallup Organization’s report that nearly two-thirds of US workers are disengaged at work are causing businesses to rethink their management models and embrace a more democratic style. The companies that choose organizational democracy will lead their industries, boost their bottom-line, and ultimately build a more democratic world.”



WorldBlu has also declared today “Democracy in the Workplace Day” to celebrate these organizations and the positive ripple effect their workplace practices are having on increasing freedom and peace in the world. Individuals are invited to use this day to examine how their workplaces can adopt and further mature their practice of democracy.

On October 16-17, 2008, the WorldBlu LIVE conference will be held in New York City and will showcase select CEOs of WorldBlu List organizations who will share their best practices and powerful insights about leadership and democracy at work.

WorldBlu, Inc. is a Atlanta-based new media and business design studio specializing in organizational democracy and freedom-centered leadership. Founded in 2003, WorldBlu works to inspire and support the design and development of democratic organizations around the world. For more information, visit the WorldBlu website at <<http://www.worldblu.com>>.

(Note to editors: Ms. Traci Fenton is available for interviews. Contact information is at the top of the release. The complete list of winners follows.)

The WorldBlu List of Most Democratic Workplaces™ 2008: (Not a ranking, but a list.)

1. 1-800-GOT-JUNK? – Vancouver, Canada
2. AIESEC International – Rotterdam, Netherlands
3. Axiom News – Peterborough, Canada
4. BetterWorld Telecom – Reston, Virginia
5. Beyond Borders – Norristown, Pennsylvania
6. BzzAgent – Boston, Massachusetts
7. Continuum – West Newton, Massachusetts
8. DaVita Inc. – El Segundo, California
9. DreamHost – Los Angeles, California
10. Equal Exchange – West Bridgewater, Massachusetts
11. FBS Data Systems – Fargo, North Dakota
12. Great Harvest Bread Company – Dillon, Montana
13. Guayaki Sustainable Rainforest Products, Inc. – Sebastopol, California
14. Innovation Partners International – Portland, Maine
15. King Arthur Flour – Norwich, Vermont
16. La Siembra – Ottawa, Canada
17. Linden Lab – San Francisco, California
18. MindValley – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
19. Motek – Beverly Hills, California
20. Orpheus Chamber Orchestra – New York City, New York
21. Pandora – Oakland, California
22. Sweetriot – New York City, New York
23. TakingITGlobal – Toronto, Canada
24. Tracer Corporation – Milwaukee, Wisconsin
25. Zimbio – Redwood City, California

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