

Charity begins in the office

— ADVERTISING FEATURE —



WEIGHTMAN SOLICITORS: (left to right) Alexandra Burdett, solicitor, Jackie Graham, support team manager, Hannah Pooley, associate solicitor, Joanna Carty, trainee solicitor, Alison Wright, paralegal, Helen Smith, receptionist, and Charlotte Greene, solicitor



HELPING: Weightmans Solicitors out on the canal. (Clockwise from back row) Partners: Jim Byard, Noel Walsh, Paul Debney, Mike Simpson and Ivor Long, with Solicitors Lucy Evans and Victoria Curran

IT'S OFTEN said that charity begins at home – but in the case of an award-winning Leicester legal practice, it's the office.

Weightmans Solicitors, in Waterloo Way, Leicester, is blazing a benevolent trail and earning an unrivalled name for itself as a local leader in corporate social responsibility.

In the last year, more than £8,000 has been raised for numerous charities and projects, including designated charity of the year ProstAid, based in Leicestershire, LOROS, Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, the Breast Cancer Campaign, and the Poppy Appeal, to name but a few.

Generous staff think nothing of taking part in gruelling marathons, mountain climbs and parachute jumps to achieve this sum, and when it comes to non-fundraising projects, they will give almost anything a go, from helping children learn to read, to re-decorating care homes, teaching computer skills to the homeless and helping out in schools.

"The idea started two years ago and we take the view that we have a moral responsibility to do more in the local community," explains Dave Cottam, regional office head at Weightmans.

"The staff can get involved with any charity or project of their choosing, but we also organise voluntary activities to do

together. If our members of staff are prepared to invest their time in doing that, we will support them and provide the means for them to be able to do it," he adds.

This unconventional addition to the working day began in the firm's Leicester branch, but has also caught on in its Manchester, Liverpool, London and Birmingham offices too.

This common cause really does include every member of staff, from new starters to senior partners. And just to prove it, Dave and fellow partners recently took to the River Soar with the Riverside Rangers, (pictured right) who monitor the city's waterways and clear them of polluting debris.

GOOD CAUSES

"We had to wear latex gloves to eat our sandwiches, because there were no washing facilities on board," says Dave.

When they're not giving to good causes, the firm carries on its day to day business as a leader in insurance, local authority, police authority and health sector work and is now emerging as a major commercial law firm.

Weightmans has augmented the development of its commercial business in the Midlands with the introduction of a Commercial Dispute Resolution and Insolvency Department, set up by partner Verona Cocks in the Leicester and Birmingham offices in 2006.

With a team of five solicitors, the department complements the existing commercial offering of regulatory and employment services acting for both private and public sector clients across the East and West Midlands.

Not surprisingly, Weightmans' fundraising activities are already helping to raise their profile throughout the county and people are virtually queuing up for the chance to work in such a fulfilling environment.

Each member of staff is given an extra two days' paid holiday a year to pursue individual voluntary goals. And flexible working hours provide even greater potential for individual fundraising abilities.

It may cost the entire firm an estimated £800,000 a year, and one per cent of the entire firm's net profits also goes to a variety of corporate social responsibility projects, but the rewards are plentiful and varied.

Just recently, the Leicester office accepted the Firm of the Year award from the Leicestershire Law Society, and there could be another on the way, following the announcement that Weightmans has also been nominated for a gong at the British Legal Awards, specifically for their community work.

But the benefits go way beyond achieving a burgeoning awards cabinet, as Dave points out.



AWARD: Weightmans named Firm of the Year at the Leicestershire Law Society Awards. Pictured is Dave Cottam, partner and regional office head at Weightmans Leicester

"It really motivates staff, and gives them new skills and added confidence," he says. "It's an excellent leveller when partners and staff work towards a common goal," he adds, making reference to their most recent joint effort for the Wear It Pink campaign, when even the most senior partners proved they too could look pretty in pink.

Perhaps most unusually, Weightmans paralegal Alison Wright currently acts as a mentor to a number of looked after children and homeless people. Only last year, one of the youngsters she looked after on work experience achieved the dream of a lifetime, getting a place at university after a glowing reference.

And as overall logistical co-ordinator and receptionist Helen Smith remarks: "What everybody does here is really from the heart. There's more to work than work."

Find out about the latest fundraising project at Weightmans, or call to arrange an appointment by telephoning 0116 253 9747 today.



Results for our clients, success for our people

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