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## The Best Culture Jobs

By: Stephanie Pearson (/1740841/stephanie-pearson) Nov 16, 2015



Photo: Federica Bordoni

## The 2016 Best Places to Work



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Check out all the categories

(<http://www.outsideonline.com/2032236/best-places-work-2015>) in this year's Best Places to Work program.

**H**alf of what makes a life of office work more enjoyable is where the office is located—two blocks from the ski lift, close to world-class singletrack, in a town with dozens of craft breweries.

The top companies on our Culture list understand this and have established themselves in some of the country's most understated hubs of outdoor recreation while giving their workers plenty of incentives to stick around.

# 1. New Belgium Brewing



Photo: New Belgium Brewing

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**Location:** Fort Collins, Colorado

**Number of Employees:** 640

Earning a spot on this list in seven of the past eight years, the Fort Collins–based brewers (<http://www.newbelgium.com/>) who bring us Fat Tire have mastered the art of on-the-job happiness. Free beer helps, but true work satisfaction stems from the fact that the company is 100 percent employee owned. “It’s the feeling here that you don’t work for a corporation. You work for each other,” says Jenny Briggs, human resources director at New Belgium. “When you care about those relationships, it creates a virtuous cycle.”

That cycle includes donating \$792,095 to watershed conservation, sensible transportation, sustainable agriculture, and other eco-friendly projects and contributing 2,517 volunteer hours to nonprofits in 2014. But charity starts at home: The company built an off-site health care center for employees and their families, and workers get paid time off for contributions to nonprofits.

The brewery's main grounds feel like a college campus, with outdoor volleyball courts, a cyclocross track, and a new gear shed where toys like stand-up paddleboards are checked out for the weekend. It's no wonder New Belgium's 640 workers include ultramarathoners, competitive surfers, and one dude, Jason Tomsic (<http://ragbrai.com/2014/07/24/video-show-us-their-wheels-skateboarding-across-iowa/>), who skateboarded across Iowa.

It pays to stick around: One year on the job earns an employee a new cruiser bike; five years earns a free trip to Belgium; and ten years wins a worker a four-week paid sabbatical. Sound good? New Belgium is now hiring for its new brewery on the site of a renovated stockyard in Asheville, North Carolina, opening in early 2016.

## 2. CCY Architects



Photo: CCY Architects

**Location:** Basalt, Colorado

**Number of Employees:** 26

Over 30 years ago, Basalt-based CCY Architects (<http://www.ccyarchitects.com/>) designed Obermeyer Headquarters in Aspen, which at the time was the largest passively heated building in the country. Sustainability is still at the core of the firm, except today the staff designs in 3D and uses a cutting-edge energy-modeling program that calculates a project's energy efficiency down to the amount and type of glass it uses.

“We are moving our products and practice toward net-zero architecture,” says Rich Carr, firm partner. With the ambitious goal to build structures that produce as much energy as they consume, it’s only natural that CCY employees need to blow off steam, which is easy to do in the Roaring Fork Valley.

“We’re in Basalt, which allows people to afford housing, raise a family, and be at the hub of all kinds of different activities,” says Carr, adding that he just got dropped on a lunchtime road ride. The firm’s annual employee wellness package can go toward anything from an Aspen Mountain ski pass to weekly yoga classes to kayaking lessons. CCY also offers an education fund for art classes or whatever employees need to keep their creativity thriving. “It’s a real self-motivating place,” says Carr. “We give employees the freedom and trust to make the work happen.”

### 3. Charles Cunniffe Architects



Photo: Charles Cunniffe Architects

**Location:** Aspen, Colorado

**Number of Employees:** 17

This Aspen-based architectural firm (<http://www.cunniffe.com/>) makes bold statements with its buildings. Case in point: It’s currently designing the K2 Ranch, a 15,000-square-foot Colorado home that’s entirely sustainable, with an array of photovoltaic solar collectors and a full geothermal system.

“The K2 Ranch is a large house with a lot of bells and whistles, but it could be totally off the grid,” says founder Charles Cunniffe. “We have high ethical standards based on lifelong learning, education, innovation, and fun.”

Cunniffe extends that ethos into his own downtown office, where employees can use their free bus passes to get to work, then use the company car or bike to make site visits to their local clients, the majority of which are local. The office environment is fast-paced but fun, with an always-on espresso machine, an open-door policy, and flexible hours so employees don't feel guilty for ducking out to watch a kid's basketball game or attend a meeting for a nonprofit like River Bridge, an advocacy center for abused kids that Cunniffe co-founded. Powder days, however, are reserved for skiing.

“Our office is two blocks from the Aspen Mountain gondola,” says Cunniffe. “Our clients understand our work-play ethic, and we expect our people to ski on a powder day.”

## 4. C1S Group



Photo: C1S Group, Inc.

**Location:** Dallas, Texas

**Number of Employees:** 22

The goal of this engineering and construction business (<http://www.c1sinc.com/>) is to take existing commercial buildings and make them better. “We want to retool them, make them environmentally friendly, and get rid of the outdated colors and carpets that mentally drag you down,” says CEO Julie Strong, who owns the company with her husband, Matt. At Frito-Lay headquarters in Plano, Texas, for example, C1S renovated the commercial kitchen, designed a solar thermal water-heating system, and completed a toilet renovation design, among other upgrades.

To keep their engineers and builders from burning out, the Strongs offer “collaboration stations” in the office, where employees can stand up for a quick face-to-face meeting. And after workers wrap a particularly brutal project, they’re rewarded with generous comp time. “If we say we want you to take 15 days off, it means you need that time off,” says Strong. There are also happy hours on the house, annual crawfish boils, a running club, and service projects like retooling an old building into a tech center for underserved kids in the Dallas area, and then volunteering to staff it.

“We get a charge out of what we do,” says Strong. “But life’s too short to work all the time. You have to have something left for the rest of you, your family, or whatever makes you happy.”

## 5. Brewers Association



Photo: Brewer's Association



**Location:** Boulder, Colorado

**Number of Employees:** 52

According to research from the Brewers Association (<https://www.brewersassociation.org/>), a new brewery opens every 14 hours in the U.S. and the craft-brew boom has created 100,000 new jobs in the past 25 years. The association represents 3,800 of those small and independent craft brewers nationwide and looks to foster collaboration among them, says CEO Bob Pease.

“One brewery doesn’t hesitate to call up another brewery across the street and say, ‘Hey, our filtration system broke down. Do you have a spare part?’” Pease says. “That is not seen in too many industries across the country.”

The association recently moved to a rehabbed office right off Pearl Street in downtown Boulder that features a soaring atrium entryway and a bar with three beers on tap, one of which is brewed by the association. Twice a year, the 52 employees split into six teams to brew up a new batch, which helps everyone on staff learn the language and process of brewing.

You might wonder exactly what kind of work goes on at the association. To give a sense, the association employs a Safety Ambassador, whose sole purpose is to educate craft brewers to improve brewery safety, and a Quality Ambassador, tasked with traveling the country to develop membership. “We look for people with the same values of our members: authentic, independent, entrepreneurial thinkers,” Pease says.

## **6. Renters Warehouse**



Photo: Renters Warehouse

**Location:** Bloomington, Minnesota

**Number of Employees:** 57

As “professional landlords for hire” the mission of Renters Warehouse (<http://renterswarehouse.com/>) is to make owning investment properties easy and worry-free for their clients. Its employees manage 6,000 properties in the Twin Cities and another 11,000 nationwide, providing assistance on everything from accounting services to full-service property management. Employees love the work, says CEO Kevin Ortner, because what they do exponentially improves their clients’ lives.

And that love shows: The company, founded in 2007, grew by 342 percent over the past three years, earned revenue of \$13.4 million in 2014, and landed on *Inc.*’s list of the 5,000 fastest-growing U.S. companies six times in the last six years. That makes for a promising career path for the predominantly first-career 20-somethings who work there, which is the single most important perk of the job, Ortner says. “We always try to promote from within. Our success is in our ability to create great careers for people who started with us and are now senior managers and executives.”

“One thing I’m most proud of,” Ortner adds, “is that we’ve been able to maintain the culture that everyone treats each other like family.”

# 7. N2 Publishing



Photo: N2 Publishing

**Location:** Wilmington, North Carolina

**Number of Employees:** 180

While failing at his post-college dream to make it as an NFL kicker, Duane Hixon fell into a cozy niche in publishing: creating monthly news publications for upscale neighborhoods nationwide. N2 (<http://www.n2pub.com/>), which Hixon co-founded, relies on reader-submitted content. That could mean a feature on a family new to a neighborhood in, say, Lake of the Isles, Minneapolis, or photos of kids trick-or-treating on Halloween.

With no online publishing presence, the concept is charmingly old school and profitable: N2 made \$65 million in revenue and grew by 50 percent in 2014. It serves 500 cities across 47 states and is responsible for every aspect of production, from advertising and sales to design and delivery.

“We want to build a nationwide business that honors God, strengthens the family, and builds financial wealth,” says Hixon, who is also the CEO. To do that, Hixon based his company close to the beach in Wilmington, North Carolina, an *Outside* Best Town (<http://www.outsideonline.com/1929386/americas-best-towns-2011>) and noted adventure hub (<http://www.outsideonline.com/1957691/30-most-incredible-trips-take-2015>).

And the perks are generous: Employees get two weeks of paid time off over Christmas and New Year's (in addition to their typical accrued time off), and there's an on-site personal trainer-nutritionist who teaches two daily yoga or core classes.

## 8. Ninkasi Brewing Company



Photo: Ninkasi Brewing Company

**Location:** Eugene, Oregon

**Number of Employees:** 105

Named after the Sumerian goddess of fermentation, Ninkasi (<http://www.ninkasibrewing.com/age-verification.html?id=1>) takes its cues from a 6,500-year-old Mesopotamian culture that worshipped the frothy ale it invented. “Beer has been connected to human civilization and cultural development since its inception,” says CEO and co-founder Nikos Ridge. “We try to create strong cultural experiences in the world and make opportunities to partner with people.”

To that end, the Eugene, Oregon–based brewery helps clean up the McKenzie River, builds houses with Habitat for Humanity, supports a demonstration farm on the McKenzie River that supplies its 105 employees with subsidized organic produce, and works with hundreds of organizations through donations and hands-on partnerships.

Luxurious digs in Eugene’s leafy, mixed-use Whittaker neighborhood sweeten the deal: Housed in a LEED-certified building, the brewery features a rock-climbing wall in the atrium, a patio bar, a tasting room with impromptu happy hours every day, and a twice-weekly massage therapist. “Our culture comes down to a lot more than what you give people,” says Ridge. “It’s about what you allow them to do and creating a work environment that gives them a chance to be the most successful based on who they are.”

## 9. Nei-Turner Media Group



Photo: Nei-Turner Media Group

**Location:** Williams Bay, Wisconsin

**Number of Employees:** 15

When this company launched in 1995, three of its five staffers were moms. “We had sick kids and school plays, and we knew that you have to work when you can to get the job done,” says publisher Barbara Krause. That philosophy has guided the company to success 20 years later.

Nei-Turner (<http://www.ntmediagroup.com/>), housed in a high-ceilinged renovated church in the village of Williams Bay on the shore of Lake Geneva, now has 15 employees and specializes in creating content for tourism organizations and trade associations.

The company has a profit-sharing program based on annual revenue goals, matches up to 3 percent of employee contributions to Roth IRAs, and offers so much flextime that an employee can work from home one day per week. Plus, everyone gets half-day Fridays in the summer and can sign up for painting or stand-up paddleboarding classes, sailing regattas, and an occasional all-expenses-paid company trip to Las Vegas.

“We have a good team that gets the work done and has a great sense of humor while doing it,” says Krause.

## 10. Deschutes Brewery



Photo: Deschutes Brewery

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**Location:** Bend, Oregon

**Number of Employees:** 462

Hands-on is the only way to describe Deschutes (<http://www.deschutesbrewery.com/>)’ nearly 500 employees, who own 7.9 percent of the company that makes Black Butte Porter and Mirror Pond Pale Ale. “We ask everybody to get involved in the company,” says Michael LaLonde, the brewery’s president. “We ask their opinion all the time, encourage them to get involved in different committees, and every year we have a facilitator come in and do focus groups on employees working conditions. Everybody has a voice.”

Whether employees, the majority of whom are based in Bend, lobby for concrete fermenters, can growlers, or new beer styles, Deschutes' cross-departmental Innovation Team takes their ideas seriously and, if they make sense, implements them almost immediately. Another team guides the company's philanthropic projects, drawing from a special fund of \$335,000 and donations to support roughly 500 nonprofits, like the Deschutes River Conservancy, the Freshwater Trust, and the Deschutes Children Foundation.

The outdoor perks of working in Bend are no-brainers: There are 300 miles of mountain bike trails and skiing or snowboarding nearby at Mount Bachelor. The brewery itself is located on 17 acres along the banks of the Deschutes River, a world-class fly-fishing stream. Employees can head out to the company's disc golf or cyclocross course, launch a paddleboard, or cast a fly within minutes of walking out the door—then crack a cold one from the monthly case of beer awarded to everyone.

**Check out the full list (<http://www.outsideonline.com/2032236/best-places-work-2015>) of our Best Places to Work in 2015.**

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