



Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams employees hold stuffed animals they made at the Build-A-Bear Workshop to donate to children at Ochsner Medical Center. Front and center are the firm's partners John Houghtaling, left, and James Williams. Not pictured is partner Celeste Gauthier.

TWO-TIME HONOREE

## Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams

People are never more vulnerable than when their loved ones are in danger.

Jerry Gauthier, head of accounting at the law firm of Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams, faced a stressful situation in 2006 when her husband had to undergo cancer treatments at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

In 2007, the grandmother of paralegal Danielle Bogan fell ill in New York, requiring Bogan had to spend eight days with her.

Both employees received all the time off they needed. The only questions asked were in regards to their personal well being. Jerry Gauthier, no relation to the firm's late founding partner Wendell Gauthier, was allowed to work from Houston while tending to her husband.

Bogan, a New York native, calls her co-workers her family in New Orleans. When she had to spend two months in Florida to work on a trial,

fellow employees helped take care of her dog.

Because of the nature of trial work, the entire office will often spend long hours in the office together while prepping for a case, which can build loyalty.

"We look at it as a football game," administrator Chuck Jouandot said.

If the necessary work is finished at the end of the week, the firm will shut down before 5 p.m. on Fridays. Employees are treated to pizza and fried chicken about every six weeks, and it's not unusual for the office to buy employees a daiquiri at the end of a stressful week.

Twice a year, the firm rents a limousine and buys the office lunch before giving them the rest of the afternoon off. The firm also has a suite at the Superdome for Saints games, and interested employees and their spouses usually go to one game a season.

**Nature of business:** law firm  
**Where based:** Metairie  
**Employees:** 33  
**Average starting salary:** \$40,000  
**Median salary:** \$45,000 for staff, \$200,000 for attorneys  
**Average employment time:** eight and a half years  
**Benefits:** health care with 100 percent coverage, prescription plan, 401(k) with 3 percent match, paid maternity leave, continuing education program, day care options, telecommuting, flexible hours, employee recognition program  
**Wait time for benefits:** none  
**Paid days off:** 43  
**Web site:** [www.ghwlegal.com](http://www.ghwlegal.com)

"We do little things to allow employees to let loose and relax," Jouandot said.

Employees also make time to give back to the community. It's not a small delegation of two or three people, employees say, as everyone gets involved. This year the firm worked on a project with the Build-a-Bear Workshop and donated the 20 stuffed bears to children at Ochsner Medical Center just before Christmas.

Such activities have fostered employee loyalty. Gauthier, who has been with the firm for 25 years, lives on the North Shore but said she has no qualms about making the 37-mile drive to work every day.

"There's no place I'd rather work than here," she said. •

— Fritz Esker