

BEST OF THE CORRIDOR II



BEST BUSINESS INSURANCE

TrueNorth Companies

5 TIMES ON LIST

Attracting high-performing talent and developing a self-perpetuating, entrepreneurial culture have helped TrueNorth Companies win the Best Business Insurance category for another year. The two elements “help them get better and focus on the needs of their clients, and really stay close to those clients and understand how to help them protect and maximize their resources, assets and opportunities,” said longtime CEO Duane Smith, also the winner of this year’s Best Business Leader (see adjacent story).

Since its founding in 2001, TrueNorth has grown its sales more than six-fold and acquired a long string of insurance agencies, including recent additions in Pella, Ames, Mason City and Denver, Colorado. Based in Cedar Rapids, TrueNorth has a large risk management practice in addition to selling insurance, and continues to add new insurance lines – a “function of listening to clients,” Mr. Smith said.

- Dave DeWitte

1ST RUNNER UP: AW Welt Ambrisco

2ND RUNNER UP: The Accel Group

BEST BUSINESS LEADER

Duane Smith, TrueNorth Companies

FIRST TIME ON LIST

TrueNorth Companies CEO Duane Smith takes the first title as Best Business Leader since 2011 with a track record that includes not only successful acquisitions and profit growth, but the building of a legacy business that will continue long after his planned retirement in 2020.



Mr. Smith said he has employed the many lessons he learned as an entrepreneur to grow TrueNorth Companies, which was founded in the 2001 merger of three insurance agencies. It now counts more than 60 business units and limited liability corporations, and revenues have grown more than six-fold to over \$100 million.

“My personal mission statement is ‘providing vision and instilling confidence in others,’” Mr. Smith said. “When I’m doing that, I’m up before the alarm clock – I’m energized. It’s my highest return on investment personally, and to the group that I’m engaged with.”

TrueNorth’s entrepreneurial platform is based on four balanced goals: Profitable operations, dynamic culture, client experience

and business development. They are measured regularly on both a corporate and individual employee basis.

“My whole focus since 2008 goes back to our company’s vision statement – to spearhead the effort to build a legacy company with structured entrepreneurial focus to attract, coordinate and develop high-performing talent,” Mr. Smith said.

- Dave DeWitte

1ST RUNNER UP: Randy Ramlo, UFG Insurance

2ND RUNNER UP: Kelly Orberg, Rockwell Collins

BEST BREWERY

Big Grove Brewery

FIRST TIME ON LIST



As big and as popular as it has become, it’s hard to believe that Big Grove Brewery started with just two guys and a U-Haul – but that’s exactly what happened. After his family’s success with Red’s Alehouse in North Liberty, founding partner Matt Swift went on the search for a smaller project of his own back in 2010.

“A buddy and I literally took a U-Haul truck out to Colorado and bought this guy’s brewery out of his garage and hauled it back here,” he recalled.

The brewery’s original brewpub opened in Solon in 2013, and an Iowa City location followed last year. Both restaurants now offer full lunch and dinner menus, with more than 30 beers – all craft brews – on tap. Just last month, Big Grove began selling its four “core beers” – Arms Race Pale Ale, Big Grove Brewery IPA, West Main Wheat and Boomtown Premium – in cans at liquor and grocery stores across the region.

Getting into manufacturing and retail sales is “a whole new world,” Mr. Swift acknowledged, adding that “Red’s is kind of where the craft beer thing started. We went from four domestics on tap to craft on tap and then bigger and bigger, until I said, ‘We should be making beer.’”

“We never expected it to become this big,” he added. “It’s exciting to think what could come next.”

- Jeff Holmes

1ST RUNNER UP: Lion Bridge Brewing

2ND RUNNER UP: Iowa Brewing Co.

BEST OF THE CORRIDOR II

TrueNorth's entrepreneurial spirit results in high performance

Since it was founded in 2001, TrueNorth's internal compass has pointed toward the vision statement of the firm: "To create a legacy company through an entrepreneurial platform that attracts, develops and coordinates high performing talent and opportunities."

With that vision in practice, the insurance and financial strategies firm has experienced growth from 90 to 350 team members and physical expansion from one to 20 locations in its 17 years.

"Such pointed focus has led to the development of our company owner's manual, which we call 'Structured Entrepreneurialism,'" said Duane Smith, CEO. "Structured entrepreneurialism provides employees with a degree of self-management that is supported by the constant ability to measure results. It is both an art and a science to connect the two, which makes it a moving target that motivates us to continue innovating and delivering cutting-edge solutions to clients."

One of those pioneering offerings is TrueNorth's Enterprise Navigator. The proprietary process examines all facets of risk within an organization and identifies

strategies that will promote culture, ensure compliance, manage risk and create financial savings.



Duane Smith

Directly in line with the company's mission statement, "To assist companies and people with protecting and maximizing assets, resources and opportunities," the Enterprise Navigator goes beyond insurance coverage so that companies can evaluate their risk at a holistic level. The approach assesses wellness, claims management, safety, HR compliance, communication and technology. For example, a company with a large number of accidents can avoid costly claims if they choose to invest in a culture of workplace safety.

TrueNorth's customer service is rooted in relationship building. Acting as a consultant, agents work with clients to understand their needs. This customized sales approach begins with advocating for customers rather than selling them specific policies and products.

In addition to personal protection, TrueNorth specializes in niche markets such as construction, transportation and professional liability. Veteran specialists

have in-depth industry knowledge that allows them to match the best solutions to their clients' needs.

Recognized as 2018's Best Business Leader, Duane Smith has been a key member of TrueNorth's vanguard since its inception. Thanks to his leadership style, which is infused with a quest for continuous learning and sharing book recommendations, TrueNorth has thrived on firm footing.

"In my own personal journey, it took me until I was 50 to really embrace what I'm passionate about and what my unique ability is. I had been working with a consultant, Dan Sullivan, who encourages people to figure out what gets them up before the alarm clock. His book "Unique Ability" walked me through a discovery process where I reached out to people I work with to help me uncover my unique abilities. Through that process, I came up with a personal vision statement: Providing vision and instilling confidence in others to succeed," Smith said.

Smith credits another book, "5: Where Will You Be Five Years from Today?" as another instrumental tool. "I love the quote, 'a goal without a plan is just a dream,'" said Smith. "This workbook helps people take ownership of their personal vision and find the confidence to

Best Business Insurance

Best Business Leader Duane Smith

execute on their plan. I've probably given out 500 copies over the last two years."

As TrueNorth continues to evolve and transition leadership from CEO Duane Smith to current President Jason Smith, the firm remains committed to its roots as a legacy company and attributes experience and trust as the grounding force for innovation and entrepreneurial drive.

"Our legacy is a core value and belief - it's what allows us to attract high-performing talent. Many large corporations can become so bureaucratic that both high and low performers are all brought to the middle. While this helps low performers, it hinders high-performing talent from meeting their full potential," Smith explained. "TrueNorth's goal is to provide a place for high performers. When there is coordination, development and accountability, even the best of the best will exceed expectations." •

**CBJ
BEST
OF THE
CORRIDOR
2018**

“
We define leadership as
the ability to communicate
the vision and instill
confidence in others
to follow and succeed.”
Duane Smith, CEO

Thank you for your vote of confidence.

We believe success is the result of great leadership, and feel privileged that our CEO, Duane Smith, has been voted as the **Corridor's Best Business Leader**. As a result of his thoughtful vision, we're also incredibly proud to be voted as **Best Business Insurance** by readers of the Corridor Business Journal.

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