

# s foundation with people

ing and a tuition reimbursement program.

Customer service coordinator Kelly Mackey, who came to Mercedes 2 1/2 years ago after earning a bachelor's degree in communications at the University of Missouri, said the employee stock option plan is a huge perk because it gives every

## Mercedes Homes Inc.

Category: Medium  
Business Type: Home building company

Number of employees: 56

employee a vested interest in the company's success.

"It's like a private savings account," Zur said. "You have this money you don't even know about."

Controller Rossy Mavety, with Mercedes for 14 years, took advantage of another employee benefit — she bought a Mercedes house three years ago at a discount.

Employees who have been with the company at least a year can buy a Mercedes home with a 5 percent down payment. The company also puts up 5 percent as a loan, which can be applied toward closing costs or upgrades. The employee pays interest on the loan for five years after which the loan is forgiven if the employee is still with the company.

"It's just a wonderful place to work," said Mavety. "A lot of people have been here long term, more

than five years."

The people make it a great place to work, Mackey said. "It's small enough to be like a family, yet large enough to be a great corporation."

"There's open communication," Zur added. "The management team is always willing to listen, to sit down and go over any concerns. You don't have to go through a vice president to talk to the division president."

Health insurance premiums for employees had been paid entirely by the company until this year. Now the employees pay \$25 a month. And after three years their short-term disability coverage is paid, as well.

Upper management is empowered to run their departments as they see fit, sometimes taking risks, Sadowski said. "It's like being a small-business owner. It's very challenging and pushes us to excel and keeps things interesting."

The entrepreneurial spirit trickles down. Lower-level employees are encouraged to make suggestions, especially to help the company in its application for national homebuilder's certification.

Cohesiveness is emphasized. The company takes employees on group activities, such as a canoe trip, bowling or volleyball and sand castle contests at Anastasia State Park.

"There's great teamwork, like a family," Mavety said. "We look out for each other."

— Paul Ivce

## EOLA CAPITAL

Dan Frey has worked at the Modis Building since it opened in June 1975 as the Independent Life Building.

Frey started as a building engineer, then became a supervisor. When Eola Capital, then known as Associated Capital Partners, bought the building in 1999, he became property manager. Now Frey is senior property manager.

For all of those 32 years, many of his co-workers have been the same. Except for some renovations to the lobby and second floor completed in 1999, little has changed. And that's just fine with Frey.

"With Independent Life, it was family-run and everyone was treated like family," Frey said. "With Eola, we've felt the same."

Eola Capital owns and manages 7.5 million square feet of office space, about 2.5 million of which is in Jacksonville. Of Eola's 107 employees, 54 are in Jacksonville.

Darren Murray, a building engineer in the Modis Building for 17 years, especially enjoys the occasional deep-sea fishing outings.

"It kind of brings everyone a little closer," he said.

Jan Sanders spent 10 years in the Navy and worked for a mortgage company before joining Eola's staff in February as an accounting assistant. Sanders said she felt at home the first moment she stepped off the elevator.

"I was like, 'Wow, this is an interesting place,'" Sanders said. "The receptionist [Fara Bruce] is one of the friendliest people I've ever met. The interview was like a conversation with a group of friends."

North Florida Vice President Caryn Carreiro said there is true concern for the continued success of the employees as well as the company. "We always try to promote from within before we look to the outside, and I think we're successful in doing that."

— William Marden

