

## BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR 2006

# More than money

## Core values, 'friendly' working environment keeps ORAU employees happy

BY RICK ROBINSON

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Colleges and universities, with their flexible schedules and stable budgets, are often known as good places to work. So it's not surprising that employees would give a strong thumbs-up to an institution called Oak Ridge Associated Universities.

ORAU, however, calls itself a company.

Though the organization is a non-profit corporation, it's definitely a business, President Ron Townsend said, with clients, contracts and project-based funding that comes and goes.

"All our employees are engaged in business activities, not in education," Townsend said. "And our budget and work involve 5,000 to 6,000 individuals, though most are not our employees."

ORAU has aimed to build a positive company culture with accessible management, good pay and benefits, a supportive work/home-life balance, diversity, dependable employment, a generous rehiring policy and a large, pleasant campus.

"This is a wonderful place to work," said Eva Graves, a custodial team leader who's been at ORAU for five years. "I've never heard anybody say anything negative."

She readily quotes Townsend's mantra about ORAU's core values — "quality, safety, integrity and diversity" — and said he's friendly, accessible and emphasizes a culture of equality.

"That is not an attitude that you find in many companies, and I've been in the work force almost 50 years," she said.

Employees use the word "friendly" a lot when describing ORAU.

"ORAU is a people-friendly company," said Archie Smart, an operations manager whose wife also works for ORAU. "Everybody here is just good folks, from what I've encountered."

ORAU tries hard to reassign employees in-house when contracts end, said Smart, who joined ORAU three years ago. He also likes that his boss doesn't "micromanage" and that the company often rehires former employees.

Communications specialist Joanna Wilkins works on Web pages and left ORAU in 1999 to take a lucrative contract job with IBM. When that job dried up last year, ORAU hired her back.

ORAU's "family friendly" attitudes rank high with Wilkins, who had two children while she was away,



JOE HOWELL/BUSINESS JOURNAL

Ron Townsend, president of Oak Ridge Associated Universities, stands in front of pictures of previous ORAU board chairs. The consortium links its research institutions with national laboratories, government agencies and private industry.

### OAK RIDGE ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITIES

- **Founded:** 1946
- **Employees:** 550 permanent, 300 temporary
- **Annual budget:** \$230 million, up from total revenue of \$98 million in fiscal 2000
- **Description:** Manages the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, administering research fellowships for nearly 5,000 scholars in association with 96 universities; four focus areas are radiation and nuclear medicine, public and environmental health, radiation-emergency response, and administration of educational fellowships in related fields. ORAU's budget also covers a slew of Department of Energy and non-DOE programs, from health screening to environmental cleanup to homeland security.

"If you have a sick child, management encourages you to go take care of that child, versus making you feel guilty about it," she said.

Rehiring former employees helps keep ORAU's turnover rate low, said Dan Standley, corporate director of human resources.

"It's not unusual for those who did leave...to say it didn't take long to recognize the difference in environments between the place they went and ORAU," he says.

But employees also say ORAU wasn't always that good. The working atmosphere has improved markedly in recent years.

The improvement "wasn't any one thing," said Rose Napier, director of employee relations and diversity. "Rather, our success is due to the communication and commitment

shared between the employees and the organization." She points to Townsend's hiring in 1997 as a turning point, along with a corporate reorganization in 1998 that streamlined working relationships and stressed diversity and cooperation.

Wendy Dupes, a business support analyst, likes ORAU's flexible-hours policy. She works a nine-hour day so that she can take every other Friday off.

"To me that's just a great benefit. I get to do things at my kids' schools or run important errands," she says.

Mark Hart, a staff nurse in the Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site, says he likes "the entire compensation package," as well as ORAU's job stability and generous employee policies.

Hart, a U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant colonel who recently served 305 days in Iraq, says ORAU was gracious about letting him return to work at his own pace when his duty tour was over.

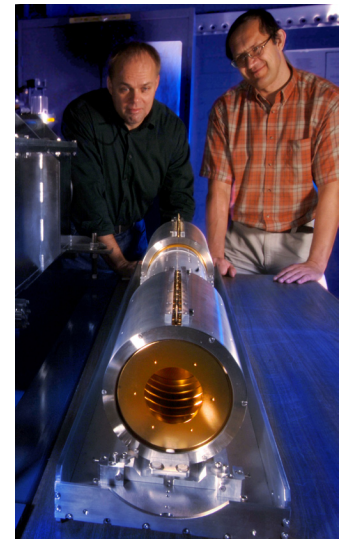
"There's more to it than just a dollar with ORAU," he says. "They've got a set of principles, and they don't sell themselves short on that."

Rick Robinson is a freelance writer in Knoxville.



OAK RIDGE ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITIES

ORAU employees Millette Smart, Jane Price, Cindy Skidmore, Rose Foster, and Eva Graves volunteered to support the Holiday Bureau of Oak Ridge, a nonprofit organization that provides new and used toys, clothing, food and books for needy families each Christmas. ORAU provides opportunities for employees to support local charities, including time away from work during the business day.



OAK RIDGE ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITIES

A 24-karat gold-plated interior is among the features of the new multi-pass-time-of-flight, MTOF, device built by ORAU's University Radioactive Ion Beam consortium. With the device are ORAU scientists Slava Shchepunov and Andreas Piechaczek, who designed the device and carried out theoretical simulations on its use. The MTOF device will enable the ORAU group to extend its research on unstable nuclei into regions currently inaccessible.