

How did this 220-person flavor company become the #3 manufacturer in the U.S.?

Fortune Names FONA Top Workplace in Manufacturing & Production

[FONA International's](#) headquarters sit about an hour outside Chicago in Geneva, IL. With twin ponds, an employee garden, volleyball court and an auditorium open to community use – it may seem a surprising location for a what *Fortune* magazine has named a top manufacturer in the nation.

A step inside the entrance reveals a clear view of a laboratory – and the dozens of scientists hard at work creating and testing flavors in food and beverage applications. A little further into the building and the scientific side gives way to the production arm of the business as state-of-the-art spray dryers and equipment tower above the employees. They perform the daily dance of manufacturing and shipping taste solutions, destined to reach all corners of the globe.

Family owned and operated, it's a business that has grown continually in its 31-year history, with business success and culture that earned it a placement on [Forbes](#) "Small Giants" list of 25 companies that strive to "be great instead of just big."

However FONA's most recent accolade is just as noteworthy. Tuesday FONA ranked as the #3 manufacturing & production workplace in the nation. The listing, by *Fortune* magazine and Great Place to Work, is irrespective of size. This puts FONA – a 220-person flavor company – alongside (and in fact ranked above) multi-billion-dollar corporations like Michelin and 3M. View the [full list here](#).

The independent [review](#) by Great Place to Work reveals themes about FONA's stated culture of growth and openness: 98% of employees rate the atmosphere, bosses and benefits as great. 97% say the same about the challenges, pride, communication and facilities.

An anonymous employee quote is featured in the *Fortune* article: "Each employee has the ability to make their role, their own. They are the CEO of their role. As long as one stays with our values, one can create their own path and destiny."



The independent review also reveals some other key features of the company: 100% paid health insurance, \$1.6 million in charitable donations annually, and a more diverse workforce than typically seen in similar companies.

“There’s something very special about being named a top workplace in manufacturing and production,” said FONA President Amy McDonald. “Manufacturing is the engine that keeps the world’s economy running. We’re proud to be a part of that economic engine. And to be named #3 on a list alongside household names like Mars and 3M? It’s an unbelievable honor.”

She added that it’s unfortunately quite rare to have a people-focused culture in the realm of manufacturing. FONA’s success goes back to the vision of the company’s founders, the Slawek family. She said that in 1987, Joseph Slawek, currently Chairman and CEO, set out to create the high-tech, high-touch (meaning high service) alternative to “business as usual” in the flavor industry.

“Joe and his family built FONA on a foundation of core values and a high-growth mission. It’s that mission that we work to live out every day,” said McDonald. “It’s all about serving the needs of customers foremost. We apply the entrepreneurial energy and values-driven culture to deliver unmatched service, speed, quality, and flexibility.”

“Manufacturers are changing the way they do business, particularly because of the opportunities presented by artificial intelligence,” said Michael Bush, CEO of Great Place to Work. “Organizations like FONA thrive by tapping into their human potential aided by artificial intelligence and machine learning to achieve ‘innovation by all’ as a competitive advantage.”

FONA in fact is often recognized for an incredible culture – often appearing as the rare manufacturing company in a list of service-driven and tech corporations. For example, FONA was one of only six manufacturing companies to be named to the list of [Best Workplaces for Women](#), and only one of two food companies.

The Company’s Most Recent Recognition

Forbes Magazine 2018 Small Giants award

Great Place to Work (Fortune Magazine):

- #3 workplace in Manufacturing & Production, *among companies of any size*, 2018
- #2 workplace in Chicagoland, out of all small-medium businesses, 2018
- Great Place to Work for All – Leadership Award for President Amy McDonald, 2018
- #85 workplace in the nation for Millennials, 2018
- #44 workplace for women in nation, *among companies of any size*, 2017
- #43 medium-sized workplace in the nation, 2017

Chicago Tribune Top Workplaces in Chicago (#8, small category), 2017

Best & Brightest Companies to Work For

- National Winner overall – 8 years in a row
- Chicago winner, 13 years in a row
- Elite Winner, Chicago – 13 Years in a row (Most Recently: Enrichment, Engagement & Retention)
- National Winner, Wellness

Food Quality & Safety Magazine 15th Annual Food Quality & Safety Award, 2016

About FONA

Founded more than 30 years ago, [FONA International](#) creates and produces flavors for many of the largest food, beverage, nutritional companies in the world. It offers flavor solutions for the confection, grain, beverage, performance nutrition, and emerging markets from its state-of-the-art, 33-acre campus in Geneva, IL. FONA's seven core values drive it to pursue excellence and foster incredible partnerships. More than just great flavors – FONA provides complete market solutions.

About the Award

Great Place to Work collected demographic and program data from organizations, but rankings were driven by employee feedback. To be considered, organizations had to meet the Great Place to Work-Certified standard and their survey results needed at least a 95% confidence level, and a 5% margin of error or lower. Employees throughout each organization were randomly invited to participate in the survey, which is designed to reveal whether it is consistently a great place to work for all its people.

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