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PARTNERSHIP LIMITED

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Food Service Caterer Award

Kate Martin



As one third of the Brookwood Partnership, managing partner Kate Martin, along with Graham Sibthorp and Sue Parfett, heads a business with a turnover in 2007 upwards of £11m that caterers at more than 50 independent schools within London and the South-east.

It's an operation that in the view of one of our judges has now "come of age and reached critical mass as a business" – something our judges felt hands-on operator Martin could take a lot of credit for.

But Brookwood has been a not-terribly-well-kept secret for sometime now, winning *Caterer's* very own Best Places to Work in Hospitality award for contract catering in both 2006 and 2007 (and picking up a commendation this year).

Set up in 1996, the company is modelled on retailer the John Lewis Partnership's employment structure. Qualifying employees from a workforce of more than 500 have long enjoyed a profit-share bonus.

It's a commitment to staff that runs deep. At the 2007 Best Places to Work, the judging panel was especially impressed by the caterer's development of its management programme for supervisors and managers. Based on 11 training workshops, it had even at that point seen 20 out of 47 site managers promoted internally, a clear demonstration of nurturing talent in an industry noted for its appalling staff turnover.

Brookwood Partnership has an employee forum that allows staff suggestions to go straight to the board and a formal review for all employees twice a year using the Learnpurple Talent Toolbox software program. Our judges were certain that this was one facet of Brookwood that should be applauded.

"They have great staff retention and have maintained their best place to work reputation," said one judge.

In March of this year the caterer was also recognised in the *Sunday Times* 100 Best Companies to Work For list, proving it is still living up to its stated aim of being an employer of choice.

Operating predominately in the independent schools market, Brookwood serves more than 25,000 pupils and staff every school day and – notably before Jamie Oliver's school meals campaign – has had a banned list of food ingredients for the past five years and a commitment to fresh, stylishly prepared dinners.

"They have taken the healthy school meals concept from strength to strength," said one of our panel.

It was enough for the Brookwood Partnership to earn recognition from the British Hospitality Association and a Food Award last year in praise of the lead it had taken in using fresh food, sourced where possible from local suppliers.

"Very environmentally aware," was another thought of one of our expert judges and something that has been formalised within the business with the Planet Matters mission statement.

The commitment, which formalises a number of the caterers already running green initiatives, is comprehensive in covering waste management and recycling, energy efficiency, pollution control, CFC elimination, provenance and transportation.

One judge summed up the reason Kate Martin and Brookwood are our Food Service Caterer Award winner for 2008 succinctly by saying: "They are focused on their sector and doing a grand job."

SHORTLISTED

- Andrew Main, chief executive, Aramark UK
- Kate Martin, managing partner, the Brookwood Partnership

THE JUDGES

- Peter Aldrich**, chief executive of Restaurant Associates, Compass Group
Jonathan Doughty, group managing director, Coverpoint Catering Consultancy
Robyn Jones, chief executive officer, Charlton House Catering
Chris Stern, managing director, Stern Consultancy
Alastair Storey, chief executive, BaxterStorey
Tim West, chief executive, Lexington Catering

