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Bedford Company A Welcoming Committee For Employee Relocations



Clivia Bettelli Baskin of
Place2Place
(photo by Glen E. Ellman)

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by John-Laurent Tronche

An employee of a major tech company moves to the Fort Worth-Dallas area from elsewhere, maybe abroad, bringing his or her family. Suddenly, it's like being in a whole new world filled with highways and roads to understand, laws, cultural dos and don'ts, language barriers, papers to fill out, a home to find and much, much more.

Understandably, it can be daunting, and that tech company has an interest in ensuring its employee remains happy and productive. So it turns to Place2Place LLC, a Bedford company that specializes in helping employees who find themselves in a new

environment get acclimated to their surroundings.

"We help global companies with their international employees that are transferred place to place," said Clivia Bettelli Baskin, founder and president of the eight-year-old corporate relocations company. "We help them get settled in not only with houses, but with schools, utilities and more. ... We help them land and get their feet on the ground and get going to integrate with people in the community."

According to the Worldwide ERC, an industry group for corporate

relocation professionals founded in 1964, \$21 billion was spent in the United States on corporate relocation during 2008. The previous year, there were more than 1.1 million U.S. tax returns claiming moving expense deductions for job-related moves. ERC-member companies make about 325,000 U.S. domestic transfers each year.

Place2Place has as many as 20 independent consultants who aid employees in their transfer from one location to another, which can involve international transfer to the U.S. – whom Baskin calls inpats.

(Think the opposite of expat.) Companies send employees to cities nationwide from places as diverse as Germany, South Africa, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and countries in South America. Typically, Place2Place's interaction with a transferred employee (and his or her family, if needed) lasts between six weeks to eight weeks. The process begins with a simple meet-and-greet, and the employee receives a welcome basket, which, for North Texas, includes information all about Texas and the community in which he or she will live (Grapevine, Southlake, Fort Worth and so on), a Texas Monthly issue, a social security application for in-pats, driver's handbook, information on what to do when stopped by the police and more. It's an orientation to everyday life, Baskin said.

A couple weeks later, a Place2Place consultant ensures the transferred employee is coming along smoothly on various paperwork and will help them find a hospital, post office, grocery store, veterinarian, doctor, library, realtor and more.

It's like condensing a year-long learning process into a few weeks, Baskin said.

"The big thing for the company is their employee can go to work with the knowledge that someone can help them out if they have any questions," she said.

As the spouse of a husband who works in the military, Baskin was no stranger to frequent moves to new and different cities and countries.

"I've lived the relocation life," she said.

As such, she saw a need for a Place2Place-style business. In 1993, Baskin was asked to put together a support group for military families to help their transition to a new environment. When she moved to North Texas she joined a company that provided relocation services.

"I thought it was incredible that companies offered that and what a great value for their employees," she said. "When it was time to move I couldn't find a company that offered the destination services and cross-cultural aspect of it, so I decided to start my own business."

DFW Orientation Services was launched in 2001 with help from the Fort Worth Business Assistance Center. (The company became Place2Place in July.) It wasn't easy at first, given the atmosphere after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Corporate relocations weren't as common as before, and some companies outright avoided moving employees to the U.S., she said. But persistence paid off as she worked around-the-clock to build relationships, make connections and get herself known in the community through work and volunteering.

"It's not an easy thing and you can't go knocking on every door," she said of starting out. "What you need to figure out is where you can meet the most people and what your niche is."

Through connections made at the Business Assistance Center, Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce and various international chambers the business came in, and now the company works with anywhere between 25 companies and 40 companies at a time.

Both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts are popular destinations for corporate relocations: New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, for example. But the Lone Star State boasts its fair share.

"Dallas, Houston and Austin have been in the top five here and there over the years," said Baskin, adding, "Fort Worth has been on the list as one of the great places to be. I think all of Texas has been known for cost of living and great family life – that really is, for Texas overall, a great asset for corporations."

-John-Laurent Tronche, Fort Worth Business Press, November 30, 2009
