

Aflac, TSYS among 'World's Most Admired' companies

By Tony Adams - tadams@ledger-enquirer.com

Two of Columbus' homegrown corporations have made Fortune magazine's list of the "World's Most Admired Companies."

Supplemental insurer Aflac Inc., headquartered on Wynnton Road, and credit-card processor TSYS, based in downtown, made the list in their respective categories.

Their listings were among 363 "admired" firms to appear in the March 16 edition of Fortune, now in stores.

TSYS, referred to as Total System Services on the list, is ranked No. 4 in the "consumer credit card and related services" category. It's behind Visa, American Express and MasterCard and just ahead of Western Union.

"We're excited and humbled by it," TSYS Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Phil Tomlinson said Tuesday before jetting off to San Francisco on a business trip.

"We talk about bringing integrity and innovation to the world of electronic payments," he said. "It's really nice to have someone recognize where we think we are."

The card processor employs 8,100 globally, about 4,400 in Columbus.

Aflac, meanwhile, has 8,360 people on its staff. That includes 4,200 in Columbus, 3,860 in Japan and 300 split between Albany, Ga., and Omaha, Neb. The company also has 74,300 independent sales agents in the U.S. and 107,400 in Japan.

"I believe that recognition on Fortune's Most Admired list validates our resilient business model and demonstrates support for Aflac's management and its commitment to doing the right thing," Aflac spokeswoman Laura Kane said Tuesday in an e-mailed statement.

The company, known for its whimsical duck television ads, is ranked No. 1 in the category of "Insurance: Life and Health." It is ahead of Northwestern Mutual, New York Life, Prudential Financial and Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance.

Aflac has been at the forefront of the executive pay issue. Its shareholders now can vote on Chairman and CEO Dan Amos' compensation. He also forfeited his bonus for 2008.

Aside from individual industry categories, Fortune ranked the overall Top 50 Most Admired firms in the world.

Topping that powerhouse list is Apple. The computer and software firm is followed by Berkshire Hathaway, Toyota, Google, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, FedEx, Southwest Airlines, General Electric and Microsoft.

Breaking down the Most Admired by states, Georgia is represented by seven firms. Aside from Aflac and TSYS, it includes Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines, Genuine Parts, Home Depot and United Parcel Service.

Alabama has only one firm on the list, Birmingham-based Vulcan Materials.

The Fortune rankings center on nine key attributes of reputation: innovation, people management, use of corporate assets, social responsibility, quality of management, financial soundness, long-term investment, quality of products/services, and global competitiveness.

GEORGIA FIRMS

- Coca-Cola
- Delta Air Lines
- Genuine Parts
- Home Depot
- United Parcel Service
- Aflac
- Total System Services (TSYS)

ALABAMA FIRMS

- Vulcan Materials

* Source: *Fortune magazine, March 16*