

# The Boston Globe

## How GE is making relocating to Boston easier for employees

The company's relocation assistance can even include buying houses that won't sell.



*General Electric global ombuds leader Charlene Giacini walks to South Station for her commute home.*

**By Jon Chesto** November 16, 2016

*This story is from the 2016 Top Places to Work issue. You'll find the full list of winners on [BostonGlobe.com](http://BostonGlobe.com) on Thursday evening.*

THE NEWS IN JANUARY that General Electric would move to Boston took veteran employee Charlene Giacini by surprise. But she didn't expect it to have a direct impact on her family.

She and her husband and two children had built a life around GE's corporate headquarters in Fairfield, Connecticut, and most of the workers there would be moving to nearby Norwalk. She had no reason to think she would be joining the 150 or so employees migrating to Boston.

Then Giacini applied for a promotion, and in May, the 48-year-old learned she got the job as GE's global ombuds leader. The position came with one big complication: Giacini would need to

relocate after all. GE's plans to open temporary offices on Farnsworth Street in Boston's Fort Point section in August didn't leave her much time.

Giacin, a self-described "Type A personality," and her husband went into overdrive. They set a move deadline that coincided closely with the GE office opening date, which would help their boys get settled in before the new school year. They worked with GE's internal task force, established to help guide employees through the process. GE's longtime relocation company, Cartus, provided information about local school systems, reimbursed house-hunting costs, and provided moving and cleaning services to empty out their Connecticut home.

At first they looked south of Boston, because they liked the idea of living near the coast. Both GE's temporary office and the site of its future headquarters are near South Station, which helped them orient the search. Eventually they decided to be closer to the city, in part to experience living in a place with sidewalks and public transportation within walking distance. "I didn't want to be so far away from the kids that it would take me an hour and a half to get there," Giacin says.

That brought them to the suburbs just west of Boston. By early August, they had an agreement on a home in Needham's Birds Hill section, and she had to say goodbye to her swimming pool and nearly 3-acre lot in Fairfield County. "We had a good piece of property in Connecticut," she says. "I knew we wouldn't be able to get that in Boston." But Giacin can walk to the commuter rail, and her boys can ride their bikes to a Dunkin' Donuts.

Her commute's much longer now — up to an hour and 10 minutes. But she can work on the train. Another upside: all the walking. "Every night when I get home, I have 10,000 steps," she says.

The human resources challenges represent the toughest aspect of any corporate move, according to John Boyd, a New Jersey-based relocation consultant. Boyd says GE has a reputation as one of the best companies in terms of handling employee relocations. Nonetheless, he says, executives may have underestimated the difficulties of transferring key personnel a relatively short distance, particularly since Fairfield County's housing market has not fully recovered from the Great Recession.

When GE relocates workers, it sometimes offers to buy their homes if they're unable to sell them before they move, an unusual perk that benefited Giacin. Her family's home was one of several GE bought because of the Boston move, a spokeswoman says. The company expects to sell them eventually.

For Giacin and her family, the hardest part was saying goodbye to their tightknit group of friends in Connecticut. But her roughly 200 co-workers on Farnsworth Street are proving to be a great support network. "We're fortunate because we knew so many people who had already been through the process," she says.

There are still challenges. Her husband has landed a temporary teaching gig at Needham High School but needs to find a long-term position. Giacin is still learning her way around her new hometown and surrounding area. Still, she's glad she made the move. She likes that her colleagues are no longer spread out across a suburban campus. "It's so energizing," Giacin says. "I'm engaging with more people now. It's a real sense of camaraderie, of everybody coming here on Day One together, starting on this new venture together."

*Jon Chesto is a Boston Globe staff writer.*