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A large, close-up portrait of Diana Williams, a woman with dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a white button-down shirt over a black and white striped top. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

## Women's Fitness Heroine

**DIANA WILLIAMS'  
UNERRING INSTINCTS  
HAVE MADE FERNWOOD  
A FORMIDABLE BRAND**



IHRSA clubs  
demonstrate the **value**  
of corporate wellness programs

# LEADING by example

By Tom Richards

**I**n today's turbulent economy, any lingering doubts about the critical importance of employee wellness can be summarily discarded. Consider the fact that the cost of employee healthcare has increased, yet again—by a staggering 7.7% in both 2006 and 2007. In fact, one study estimates that, for the first time in history, the typical Fortune 500 company can expect to spend as much for employee healthcare benefits as it earns in after-tax profits.

The steep cost of healthcare benefits represents just one aspect of the economic impact of unhealthy employees. Several studies suggest that an ailing workforce can have devastating *indirect* ramifications, such as lower productivity, higher rates of disability and injury, elevated rates of absenteeism, and increased workers' compensation claims. →

## Leading by example

Such alarming economic realities are prompting many corporations to develop employee wellness programs. Fortunately, the results are encouraging. For example, a recent review of 56 published studies relating to such programs revealed an average savings-to-cost ratio of \$5.81 to \$1.00.

Clearly, the business community's heightened attention to employee health presents an enormous opportunity for the fitness industry. It's a chance to rescue corporations from the prison of insurance premiums, while demonstrating, fully and unequivocally, the economic benefits of exercise. Not surprisingly, a recent worldwide survey of fitness professionals,

by CAC's own corporate wellness consulting division, Cooper Ventures, and is overseen by a dedicated program manager.

CooperFit is an annual incentive-based program that offers employees a variety of wellness activities. These include: biometric screening; wellness assessment; healthy lifestyle challenges focused on sound diet, stress-reduction, and maintaining the proper weight; onsite and online seminars; physical-activity tracking; the Cooper Campus 5K; community events, such as road races, volunteer opportunities, and blood drives; discretionary local activities, such as the American Heart Association's National Wear

Red Day, Walk Like MADD shoe donation, and National Employee Health and Fitness Day; and the Wellness Champion, which is awarded to those individuals who make a special effort to promote CooperFit to other employees.

Throughout the year, staff accumulate "reward points" for participating in the various activities, and, at the end of

the year, these points can be redeemed for cash.

The program is intentionally broad and inclusive. "Cooper employees are a diverse group, and, so, our offerings have to be varied, as well," explains CooperFit program manager Melanie Algermissen.

CooperFit also incorporates a Web-based component, which allows employees to customize their account, track their reward points, participate in online activities, research health topics, and utilize various wellness tools available on the Website.

"Dr. Cooper, our executives, and our participating employees are very satisfied with the success of CooperFit," reports Algermissen. "Our participation continues to grow, and, like many other companies, we face the challenge of constantly improving and adding services to address particular health risks. Ultimately, maintaining good health makes much more sense than trying to restore it once it's been lost."

## We need to face an important issue: Is the fitness industry practicing what it preaches? Are clubs, chains, and industry suppliers offering and/or underwriting wellness programs for their own employees?

released by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), predicted that both "comprehensive health-promotion programming at the worksite" and "worker incentive programs" would be among the top 20 worldwide fitness trends this year.

But it would be insufficient to gauge the promise of employee wellness programs only in terms of growing our own business. The discussion also begs an important question: Is the fitness industry following suit? Is it practicing what it preaches? Are clubs, chains, and industry suppliers offering and/or underwriting wellness programs for their own employees?

CBI talked to three well known companies about their efforts to walk the wellness talk. In providing wellness options for their employees, these forward-looking firms are setting an example for the industry at large.

### WELLNESS COUP AT COOPER

The Cooper Aerobics Center (CAC) in Dallas has a history as a pioneer in the industry. In fact, this health/fitness complex, founded by the legendary Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, has offered an employee wellness program since 1992.

The current program, known as CooperFit, is administered



### 'PLUSSES' FOR THEIR STAFF

The *raison d'être* of Plus One Health Management, a management company based in New York City, is to deliver fitness, wellness, spa, and physical-therapy services to its clients, including luxurious five-star hotels, financial-services firms, law partnerships, publishers, pharmaceutical companies, and hospitals.

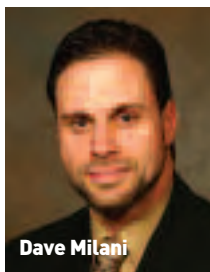
"As a company responsible for promoting health and wellness within our client organizations, it's



Staff strides at Cooper Aerobics Center



Employees exercise at Wellbridge



Dave Milani

important that we practice what we preach,” explains Dave Milani, the company’s vice president of human resources.

Accordingly, Plus One has established a number of employee wellness activities, such as free access to any Plus One facility, with discounted rates for spa products, massage services, and personal training; cash incentives—e.g., a two-month respite from paying the employee portion of the company’s healthcare premiums—for those who work out more than 100 times in a calendar year; an employee assistance program, offered through United HealthCare, that provides free 24/7 access to nurses, counselors, financial consultants, and attorneys; motivational programs, such as “The Biggest Winner,” which involves exercise and nutrition training, and online and onsite nutrition education.

Milani regards the employee wellness program as an extension of the company’s mission. “Plus One’s most deeply held corporate value is health,” he explains. “Our wellness program reinforces that message within our team.”

### BRIDGING THE WELLNESS GAP

The Wellbridge Company, a chain of upscale athletic clubs and spas based in Greenwood Village, Colorado, has its own dedicated employee wellness offering called, simply enough, the Corporate Wellness Program. Its creation was prompted by two developments, recalls Lisa Dreiling, the director of benefits and risk management.



Lisa Dreiling

“First, during our annual focus-group meeting about employee benefits, we heard many of our staff

saying that they wanted to quit smoking and lose weight,” she explains. “Additionally, we reviewed the total claims expense for our corporate office, and found that the ‘per-employee/per-month’ cost was \$507.83 vs. the Wellbridge Company average of \$419.80. We addressed the concerns of the corporate office, and set out to develop a program that would assist this group of workers, and, hopefully, make our self-funded health insurance plan more successful.”

The Corporate Wellness Program consists of a variety of wellness activities, including a self-directed and self-reported exercise program; a complimentary club membership; a points-based program for making healthy decisions (e.g., exercising, choosing stairs over elevators, drinking more water, etc.); a “Lunch and Learn” lecture series; “Corporate Recess,” a series of 30-minute instructor-led outdoor activities (e.g., obstacle courses and shadow boxing); and prizes for accumulating certain levels of points.

In 2006, its inaugural year, the program boasted an 89% participation rate. This year, due to positive feedback, management support, and positive word of mouth, the participation rate has climbed to 98%, says Dreiling.

As one might expect, the high level of participation has generated some wonderful personal stories. “We have many individuals who’ve lost substantial weight, discontinued medications, and quit smoking.”

Those stories, taken together with increased employee productivity and reduced health-plan expenditures, make Wellbridge delighted with its decision to invest in wellness. “With all the assets at our disposal—personal trainers, nutritionists, and experienced fitness professionals—we can’t afford not to remind our employees that good health is key to their lifestyle and to the success of our health insurance plan,” concludes Dreiling. —

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