

Local Companies Win Awards as Healthiest Employers for 2013

By: Jane Adler

The best practices in corporate wellness were showcased recently when five local companies took top honors as Illinois' Healthiest Employers for 2013. More than 100 companies competed for the awards in five categories.

"All of these organizations have a desire to foster a culture of well-being and health," says Rod Reasen, CEO at Healthiest Employer LLC, an analytics firm based in Indianapolis that specializes in wellness and holds awards programs for the healthiest employers in 44 cities across the country.

This is the second year the competition has been held in Chicago. Sponsors included Cigna, CVS Caremark and HUB International Ltd. The program was produced by Crain's Custom Media.

While many corporate wellness programs begin as a way to reduce the cost of health insurance, Mr. Reasen says employers now are more focused on promoting healthy behaviors to boost productivity. "It's a real trend," he says.

As the 2013 winners show, each company takes a different approach to wellness depending on its culture and resources. Here are highlights of this year's award-winning wellness programs.



2013 Illinois' Healthiest Employers award winners along with event sponsors: (L to R) Candace Jodice, CVS Caremark, Sue Podbielski, Cigna, Mary Sullivan, Mather LifeWays, James Heath, Health Care Services Corporation, Joanie Bretag, Ottawa Dental Laboratories, Joe O'Brien, Interactive Health, David Denor, Crain's Chicago Business, Matt Carlen, Centegra Health System, Rosa Jeschke, Centegra Health System, Neil Hughes, Hub International

Mather Lifeways (500-1,499 employees)

Mather Lifeways, a nonprofit provider of services to the elderly and manager of several retirement communities, has a mission to help people age gracefully. That goal dovetails nicely with the organization's employee-wellness program, says Mary Sullivan, vice president of human resources at Mather Lifeways, Evanston. In fact, Ms. Sullivan and Mather Lifeways CEO Mary Leary sometimes hold one-on-one meetings while walking side-by-side on treadmills. "It sets the tone," Ms. Sullivan says.

Mather Lifeways holds an annual wellness fair where employees complete health risk assessments and biometric measurements, such as cholesterol and glucose levels. Each employee receives a report on the results along with an overall wellness score. Employees get \$100 in incentives for participation plus a \$300 discount on 2014 health insurance premiums for achieving scores in the healthy range.

The company's Institute on Aging offers research-based programs to employees, including whole-person wellness assessments, brain-fitness and stress-reduction programs, and online information for working caregivers.

Looking ahead, Ms. Sullivan says: "We are considering new initiatives for 2014 to cultivate our wellness culture."