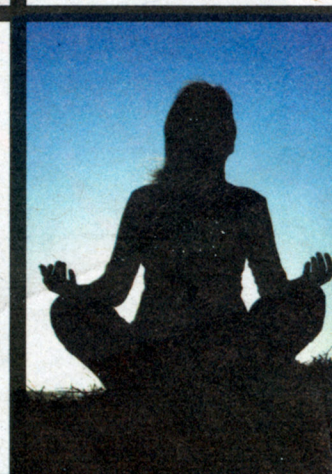


June 17, 2011

# HEALTHIEST EMPLOYERS<sup>®</sup> of Western Pennsylvania



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## Penn United lends a helping hand

BY KATE GIAMMARISE

A major part of the workplace wellness program at Penn United Technologies Inc. is annual biometric screenings, a quick screening that collects information about an employee's height, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose.

These have been successful at helping workers improve their health and at preventing problems before they even start, according to Esther Locke, Penn United's occupational health nurse.

Take the case of one employee, a man in his early 30s, who realized his blood sugar was elevated because of a biometric screening.

"Because they were able to catch this early — and through his determination — he has watched his diet, thus avoiding the start of medication at a young age," Locke said.

Another employee, a woman in her 30s, realized through the screening that she had elevated blood pressure and cholesterol. She placed herself on a strict diet and exercise program, lost nearly 10 pounds and lowered her blood pressure. Her

**Penn United Technologies Inc.**  
High-precision manufacturing services

**LOCAL EMPLOYEES:** 561

**LOCATION:** Cabot

**WEBSITE:**  
www.pennunited.com

**KEY COMPONENTS OF WELLNESS PROGRAM:** Encouraging employees to improve their weight and other health indicators tracked through biometric screenings.

biometric screening the following year was within normal limits. "This had such a positive impact on her lifestyle," Locke said.

Located in Cabot, Penn United is a precision metal manufacturer, making metal parts used in the medical, defense and auto industries. The company's 561 workers are engaged in metal stamping, carbide manufacturing and precision tool and die design.

Penn United's wellness programs have been in place for about six years, and the company is seeing results in its bottom line, Controller Michael Gore said. While the firm doesn't have a firm number it can pinpoint in terms of cost savings, Gore said the company looks at its insurance costs per member, per month, and compares its own trend rate to national and regional averages. Penn United has seen a 2 percent increase in its costs annually, compared to national and regional average increases of between 7 percent



JOE WOJCIK

**Electrical engineer Daryl Vettori rides his bike 100 to 200 miles a week, year-round.**

and 9 percent, Gore said.

"We believe part of that (slower rise in costs) is due to wellness programs," Gore said. "Our goal is to control costs. But we are concerned about our employees' health, not just for our benefit as an employer, but for them as well."

Penn United's program has three components critical for a workplace wellness program's success, said Wendy Vida, who works with Penn United as a manager of health promotion for Highmark. First, there are on-site programs and screenings that make it easier for workers to take part; second, there's incentives for employees to participate; and third, there's a strong level of support from senior management.

A major part of the workplace health program is the annual biometric screenings.

"(Employees) can see — because they've changed their lifestyle — their numbers improve (from year to year)," Locke said.

Employees have a financial incentive to get healthier as well. They are eligible for rewards of a few hundred dollars if they complete certain goals. And, recently, the firm has started offering the biometric

screenings to employee's spouses as well.

"We want the spouses to know what their (numbers are) too because they're on our health insurance as well," she said.

Penn United also has worked with Highmark to dig into this health data to look for trends and risks. Analyzing this employee health data can give the company a better picture of what risks and chronic conditions employees face so Highmark can better match them with the right programs, Vida said. She added that employees are the only ones who will have access to their individual data, and Highmark is only examining data on the aggregate level so that a person's data can never be tied back to them or to their claims.

In addition to its other programs, there also are tobacco cessation programs for smokers and smokeless tobacco users, and lots of encouragement to participate in local 5k walks and other physical activities such as intramural sports leagues.

"We just encourage them — whenever they're not behind their machines — to get up and move," Locke said.

KATE GIAMMARISE is a freelance writer.



JOE WOJCIK

**Software engineer Corey Purcell, his wife, Erica, and their daughters, Sennett, 6, and Adalin, 11 months, participated in the company's recent 5K walk and run.**