

## Workplace offers healthy alternatives

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MANITOWOC -- When Carol Green gets tired from sitting at her desk all day long, she can join fellow employees on a scheduled energy walk.

"To get outside in the fresh air -- even if it's cold -- is a nice break," Green said.

And when her stomach starts to growl, she can choose a healthy snack from the company's vending machine.

Green is the front office receipt manager at **Americollect** Inc., a Manitowoc collection agency that is among growing numbers of companies encouraging their employees to lead healthy lifestyles.

Many of the healthy ideas come from the employees themselves, said Julie Bruckschen, call center production manager and coordinator of the company's Healthy Work Environment program, now in its second year.

"We have a totally open-door policy. People bring in their ideas," Bruckschen said.

The twice-daily energy walk has been a popular one.

"We needed something more than just breaks, lunch and supper," Bruckschen said. "We felt employees needed a break from their computers."

Crystal Casavant, a customer service representative, has found the walks beneficial. "My energy used to fall off in the middle of the afternoon. It's a pick-me-up, a revitalization," she said. "I'm sharper and quicker and more on top of things."

Green agrees: "It helps break things up. It helps me come back with a fresh mind."

The make-up of the groups changes daily, so the walk doubles as a team-building exercise.

"They're not allowed to smoke, to snack or use their cell phones or window-shop. And they're not allowed to talk about work," Bruckschen said. "The idea was for them to get to know each other. They talk about their kids, their families, things like that. We're about relationship building."

When the company has food days and staff meetings, they incorporate sub sandwiches rather than hamburgers and plenty of fruit and vegetable platters and salads.

"We don't do desserts," Bruckschen said. "I think people are less groggy and not so bogged down as when you have bigger meals."

Even the company vending machines are stocked with healthy foods like canned fruit, pretzels, low-calorie snacks, sandwiches on whole-wheat bread and water.

Employees credited company president Kenlyn Gretz for promoting a healthier workplace, which includes everything from sponsoring company sports teams to participating in fund-raising walks.

**Americollect** Inc. also has begun working with the Holy Family Memorial Work Health Options program because employees expressed an interest in learning CPR, Bruckschen said.

The company plans to team up with 10 other local businesses to hold a blood drive in August.

"We look to give back to the community," said Bruckschen, who gives talks at local schools about blood donation.

The company recently held "The Biggest Loser" contest patterned after a popular television show. Ten employees participated in the weight-loss competition over about a six-week period.

Casavant lost seven pounds participating in the contest and plans to continue losing weight by eating healthier, she said.

She has asked her co-workers to offer gentle reminders if she strays from her goals, Casavant said.

"I really appreciate it," she said of the company's health-oriented approach. "They allow me to take a little longer for lunch, and I run across the street to Curves."

The program takes a positive approach.

"Our goal is not to make people feel bad. We encourage. We talk about it. We give tips," Bruckschen said.

"We hope the more you have it out there, people realize how good it is for you."

The bottom line is that it's good for the employees as well as the company.

"People are enthusiastic," Bruckschen said. "They want to come to work."

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