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## At Bukaty Cos., employees are stepping up for enhanced wellness

By RUTH BAUM BIGUS  
Special to The Star

**Company:** Bukaty Cos. is an employee benefits and insurance consulting firm serving small businesses in the Kansas City area ranging from two to about 2,000 employees.

**Telephone:** 913-345-0440

**Address:** 11221 Roe Ave., Leawood

**Web site:** <http://www.bukaty.com/>

**Employees:** 100

**Ownership/management:** Mike Bukaty owns the company and serves as president. Mary Amundsen is senior vice president.

**Challenge:** Enhancing employee wellness.

**Background:** As an HR service provider, Bukaty encourages its clients to conduct health-risk assessment of employees. Bukaty also conducts the same assessment of its own employees. In spring 2008, some issues surfaced about Bukaty's work force.

"People talked about their physical inactivity in general and stress keeping up with client needs," Bukaty said. "When I saw these results, I went to Mary (Amundsen) and said we need to fix these problems."

Added Amundsen: "It made sense for us to be a leader in this, and minding our own business is important. We needed to take proactive measures."

**Action steps:** "I started looking at the surgeon general's recommendation for people to take 10,000 steps a day to maintain a healthy heart," Amundsen said.

Employees were allowed to take two breaks a day, so Amundsen created a program — "Move It & Lose It"—encouraging them to get moving during that time. Each employee was issued a pedometer and a track sheet to record steps.

"If you reached a targeted number of steps during a set period, you're recognized at a company meeting and given prizes such as gift cards," she said.

Posters promoted the program.

"We wanted employees to at least one time a day give yourself a break and take a 10- to 15-minute walk," she said.

To kick off the effort in May 2008, the company invited employees to "walk out" at 9 a.m.

"We took a group walk, and it was quite a sight to see about 85 people walking along College Boulevard together," Bukaty said.

The walking program struck a chord with employees, who then approached management to sponsor a contest based on TV's "Biggest Loser." Cash prizes were given to the employees who lost the biggest percentage of weight over a three-month span. Prizes were given to the male and female winner as well as the team winner.

The company provided a payroll deduction to pay for membership to a particular gym — a project put together by a group of employees.

Other healthful steps included removing food vending machines and adding healthy drinks to beverage vending machines. Bukaty management also changed the food at company-sponsored breakfast and lunch meetings.

Rather than doughnuts, it's yogurt and yogurt bars, Bukaty said.

**Results:** Although the Move It & Lose It program was started a year ago, Amundsen said employees continue to participate.

"Even without us promoting it again, it's still a part of our culture," she said.

In the "Biggest Loser" effort, employees lost a total of 325 pounds, and Bukaty awarded \$3,000 total for their efforts.

Although a second health assessment has not been taken, Bukaty and Amundsen said employees seemed less stressed and were more active. Bukaty cited bonus results as well.

"People forged relationships with people in other departments that heretofore they hadn't," Bukaty said. "Our goal is to take this to the next level ... and see if we can give any discounts on their (employees) health insurance for participating in the program."

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