

A Case Study from

Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce



# *Small Business Creates a Culture of Wellness*

Well City Milwaukee in collaboration with:



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## Employee Wellness: A Strategic Business Priority

The Small Business Administration reports that small businesses employ more than 50% of the private sector working population in the United States and pay nearly 45% of the total U.S. private payroll. These statistics highlight the prevalence of small businesses and underscores the potential that exists for improving the health of the U.S. workforce.

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) represents more than 1,800 member businesses, both large and small, with more than 300,000 employees in the metro Milwaukee area. The MMAC, with 35 employees, is itself a small business that has served as a model of well workplace excellence.

“We believe that promoting healthy lifestyles to our employees is an investment in the organization’s most valued assets,” said Tim Sheehy, President of the MMAC.

### *Wellness Vision Statement:*

*The MMAC seeks to empower each of its employees to reach their personal health and fitness goals through educational sessions, activities, informational pieces, and office wide incentives.*

### Creating a Supportive Work Environment

In addition to senior level support, the power behind the MMAC wellness program comes from the dedication and creative thinking of their eight-member wellness team. This group plans and implements a wide variety of engaging health-related activities and education opportunities. Their efforts have helped facilitate changes in the MMAC work environment that encourage positive health actions and reinforce healthy behavior changes.

The MMAC’s wellness program has grown and evolved over the years. “I think our programs are quite innovative for a small organization. We like to be creative and think outside the box to keep the activities and educational sessions fresh and new,” says Tonya Gorst, Scholarship Program Manager, Healthy Lifestyles Liaison, and Wellness Team Leader. Employees can participate in a number of activities that are planned on a regular basis. The wellness team schedules quarterly lunch and learn sessions that address popular health topics, maintains a wellness lending library consisting of health-related books and educational materials, and keeps employees informed by publishing a quarterly “Healthy Living” Health Awareness Team newsletter. They also sponsored a “Biggest Loser” competition.

A walking competition is offered two times per year. However, this is not a traditional walking program. This program has a unique twist. Participants compete by not only tracking their daily steps; they can also win prizes through a clever scavenger hunt component. During their lunch hours, pairs of employees put on their walking shoes and explore the blocks surrounding their downtown office in search of answers to the week’s scavenger hunt question. A recent campaign hint had MMAC staff walking 11 blocks from their office to identify the Irish Proverb on the building at 819 N. Cass Street. About 50% of the staff gets involved. Gorst explains that the walking program combined with the scavenger hunt promotes physical activity while



encouraging teamwork and reduces employee stress.

The wellness team also reinforces healthy eating habits. They have a long-standing tradition of offering a salad-bar buffet for employees twice a week. “I look forward to days we have salad bar,” shares wellness team member Joline Woodward. “It has certainly helped me increase the number of veggies I eat each week.” When employees have a craving for a snack during the day, they can pick up one of the healthy snacks that the wellness team keeps in stock in the lunchroom. Choices include everything from fresh fruit and raisins to string cheese and granola bars. This helps employees get through their busy days and still stay on track with their wellness goals. If all this is not enough to support employee efforts to eat healthy, wellness team members have been known to issue award certificates to employees who were spotted eating a healthy snack and setting a good example for others.

### Wellness Score Reflects Positive Changes

The on-going wellness activities and supportive wellness culture that has evolved at the MMAC has made a difference in the overall health and well-being of the employees. A key component of the MMAC wellness program is a company-sponsored health screening that has been offered annually for the past six years. Employees and spouses are eligible to participate in this on-site screening for blood pressure, body mass index, cholesterol, triglycerides, and glucose. Everyone also has the opportunity to

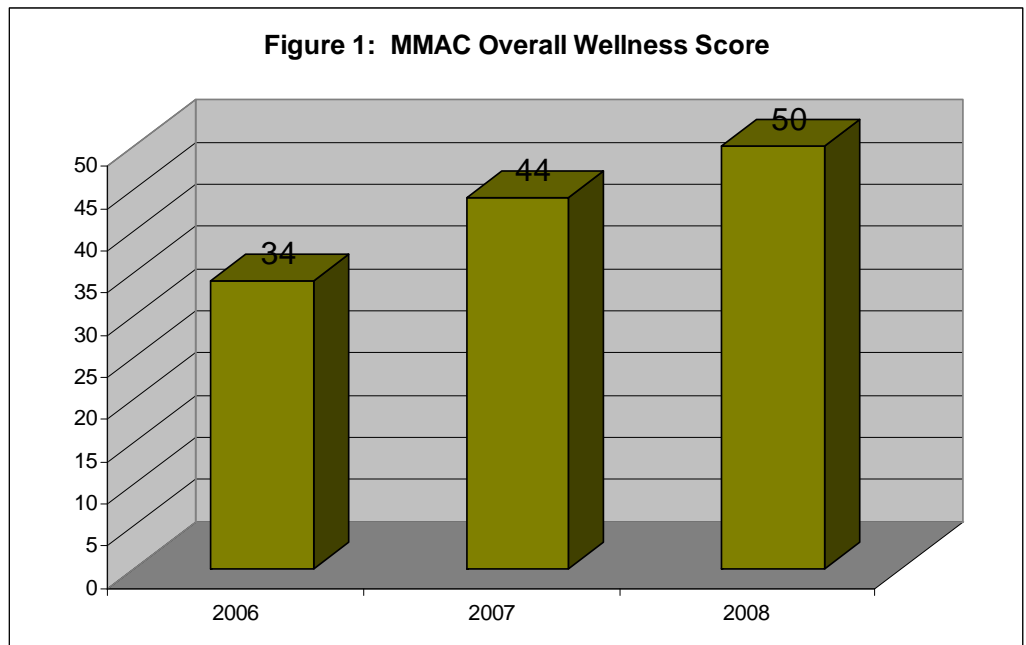
complete a Health Risk Assessment (HRA) and engage in two telephone health coaching sessions. Incentives are offered to encourage participation. All employees who complete the three components, including the health screening, HRA, and coaching sessions, receive a discount on their health insurance premium.

In general, employees are making long-term positive behavior changes which are leading to fewer health risks. A measure of their success is the Overall Wellness Score reported in the annual HRA. This score is based

Overall Wellness Score Ranges
Excellent 75 to 100
Doing Well/Good 50 to 75
Needs Improving/Fair 25 to 49
Caution/Poor 0 to 24

on employee behaviors and modifiable lifestyle habits in the categories of physical activity, nutrition, stress management, substance use, and safety practices. Based on a 100-point scale, the HRA score gives the MMAC a way to track group progress.

The Overall Wellness Score improved each year of the program (See Figure 1). After several years of being in the “Needs Improving/Fair” category, they achieved a



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score of 50 in 2008 which elevated them into the “Doing Well/Good” range.

### Overall Improvements in Health Risk Profile

Another indicator of improved health of the group is the health risk profile which tracks the average number of health risks per employee. This measurement is based on data from the HRA relating to health status and health behaviors such as weight, stress, cholesterol, eating habits, blood pressure, smoking, and exercise.

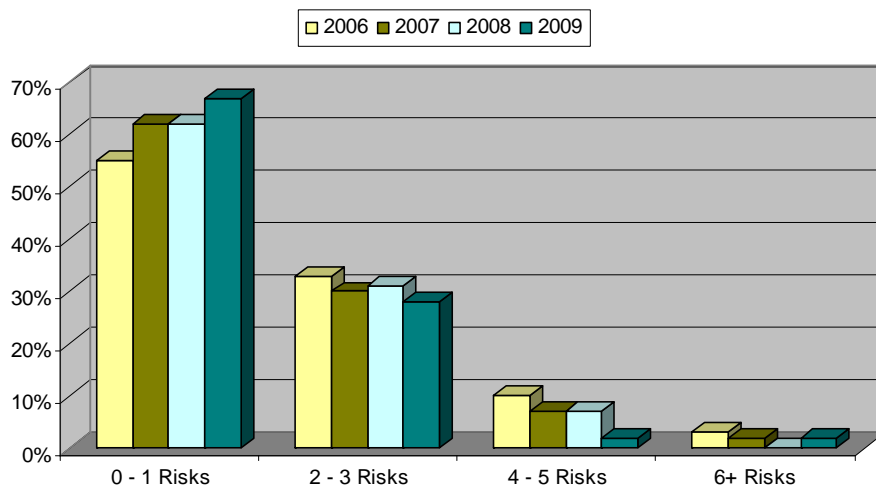
The percent of MMAC employees in the low risk category (0 – 1 risk) has increased steadily over time (See Figure 2) indicating that employees are adopting healthier behaviors. In 2006, just over half of MMAC employees had one or no health risks. This percent jumped to 62% in 2007 and remained at that level for 2008. The most recent results for 2009 reflect another increase with 67% of MMAC employees falling into the low health risk category.

Gorst attributes the improvements in the Overall Wellness Score and health risk profile to an increased awareness among employees about healthier lifestyles. “Our wellness program is all about helping employees become more aware of things they can do to improve their health. Our goal is to offer health education and a work environment that supports healthy lifestyles.”

In 2008, the MMAC received the national Small Business Well Workplace Award from the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA), becoming the first accredited Well Workplace in the state of Wisconsin at the Small Business level.

The MMAC is a partner in the in Well City Milwaukee initiative along with the City of Milwaukee and the Greater Milwaukee Committee. ■

**Figure 2: MMAC Employee Health Risk Profile 2006 - 2009**



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