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Putting
WELLNESS
to Work

HAPPY, HEALTHY EMPLOYEES
ARE GOOD FOR BUSINESS

FROM THE OFFICE TO THE JOBSITE, HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS BOOST EMPLOYEE MORALE

BY LAUREN PINCH

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Some construction firms also might say it helps them retain their best employees, reduce their health care and workers' compensation premiums, and improve company morale.

BEST

Places to Work

GREENER, HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

Pioneer Construction, Grand Rapids, Mich., has an all-encompassing approach to wellness. The company believes wellness stems from a collaborative team environment that supports both personal and professional development, as well as safety, community service and sustainable work practices.

“We strive to create an inspiring and engaging workplace culture that attracts and retains the most talented and creative professionals in the construction industry,” says Chris Beckering, director of business development at Pioneer Construction. “Community involvement is a cornerstone of our corporate culture, so we provide opportunities for and encourage our team members to give back their time and talent.”

Pioneer Construction has a proactive safety program that rewards safe construction practices and behaviors while maintaining high levels of accountability. Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Western Michigan Chapter awarded the company its Construction Safety Award of Excellence in 2009.

The focus on wellness also extends to sustainable practices.

“Our sustainable practices around the office foster environmental stewardship and a collective pride in our efforts to reduce waste, energy consumption and inefficiency,” says Tim Schowalter, president of Pioneer Construction. The company recently was named ABC’s first Green Certified Contractor in the Midwest has been and one of *Engineering News-Record’s* “Top 100 Green Builders in America” for two consecutive years. Companies earn ABC’s green certification through an extensive application process that assesses their efforts toward creating sustainable workplaces both on and off the jobsite. (For more information, visit www.greenconstructionatwork.com.)



Rubbish removed from the creek.



Pioneer employees participate in a community Adopt-a-Stream effort at Plaster Creek in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Pioneer Construction’s focus on wellness and sustainability pays off in the form of positive relationships with customers and subcontractors.

“Our commitment to a sustainable workplace culture and the passion of our team members demonstrates to our clients that we are walking the walk,” Beckering says. “Our expertise with LEED-certified building programs and sustainable construction practices provides a distinct competitive advantage when these considerations are of importance to prospective clients.”

In other words, healthy workplaces can help contractors win more work.

“Our subcontracting partners enjoy working with us and provide aggressive bids because they know our jobsites will be clean, safe and well-supervised. This adds to our value proposition in an increasingly competitive marketplace,” Beckering says.

THE BIG PICTURE

With layoffs and slowdowns a reality in 2010, it’s more important than ever to maintain a positive work environment for employees who may be left carrying the workload of two or more individuals, or who may be feeling anxiety about fewer projects coming down the pipeline.

While not all companies have wiggle room in the budget to cover the cost of gym memberships, many improvements—like promoting healthier foods, recycling programs or community service—are free.

The investment of resources ultimately results in better employee retention rates. At Pioneer Construction, many employees have been with the company for 10, 20 and 30-plus years.

“We believe there is no better testament to our positive workplace culture than the exceptional average tenure for a company of our size,” Schowalter says. “Our greatest assets are our intellectual capital and human resources. The success of our team relies upon the skilled hands and creative minds of our team members. We have seen a direct return on our investments in innovative health, safety and wellness programs.”

Lauren Pinch is assistant editor of *Construction Executive*.