



STAFF PHOTO/ADRIAN KRAUS

Paychex employees Nancy Perea, Janine McCullough and Debbie Tyrrell stroll ahead of their colleagues during a group walk around the parking lot of the company's Webster offices. Paychex is the recipient of a 2007 Wealth of Health Award for its focus on employee health and wellness.

Best foot forward

Paychex was recently recognized for its focus on health and wellness.

By **AMY CAVALIER**

Messenger Post Staff

When Tammi Panton noticed her clothes felt a little tight and her energy levels were a bit sluggish, she decided to work out.

"I had started some cardio on my own, running, walking, jogging a couple days a week," she said. "I wasn't consistent,

though."

Inspiration came from an unlikely source – work. A paralegal at Paychex's corporate offices in Penfield, Panton decided to participate in the "Eat Well. Live Well." challenge going on at her office.

According to Bob Merberg, wellness program manager at Paychex, more than 1,500 local employees participated in the eight-week program that was offered by Wegmans and the Rochester Business Alliance. To meet the challenge, employees were required to track their steps each day and strive for five cups of fruits

or vegetables a day.

Panton said it was just what she needed to keep up with her health and fitness goals.

"I'm a pretty competitive person, so I felt like I had to get my 10,000 steps a day in and do my minimum of five fruits and veggies a day," she said. "I started out trying to meet those goals immediately rather than making it a gradual change."

Paychex is one of nine local businesses honored with a Wealth of Health Award from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and

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Paychex workers put best foot forward

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the Rochester Business Journal. The companies will be presented with the awards at a June 5 luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Rochester.

Merberg said Paychex's focus on employee wellness started in 1997 with Will Kuchta, Paychex vice president of organizational development.

"It is a company that's really committed to creating a great place to work, to having employees that are happy and healthy, and recognizing that happy and healthy employees are good for the company's bottom line," he said.

Merberg said helping employees stay healthy also helps reduce health care costs.

Paychex has been offering free online health screenings for years through its WellPower program. There are also on-site health screenings. Employees can call a health advocate by phone for guidance. A personal wellness coordinator is available to help employees set goals, get encouragement and follow up on their progress.

Some of the programs are

offered directly through Paychex, said Merberg, while others are coordinated through private providers, which ensures confidentiality.

Paychex also offers a wellness discount of \$50 per employee per year. It can be used on a gym membership, to register for a 5K race, or even for a new pair of sneakers, said Merberg. To get the reimbursement, employees must take the online health assessment and contact the personal wellness coordinator.

The company offers a \$100 reimbursement for tobacco cessation, and those who don't smoke or make a commitment to stop get a reduced insurance premium.

The company's commitment to its 11,500 employees' wellness goes beyond physical health, according to Merberg.

Employees have access to a personal assistant through the company's employee assistance program.

"For example, I had a dent in my car," he said. "I wanted to identify a local body shop to do the estimate. I called my personal assistant, they did the homework and came back

to me with three recommendations."

It's a service aimed at reducing employee stress and helping them maximize their time.

"One of the things that stands in their way of wellness is they have a lot of demands on their time, balancing work and family," he said. "If we can help them with some of those daily tasks ... hopefully, that will help them free up time to exercise, prepare healthy meals and in general, reduce their stress."

Panton said the will power, planning and trips to the market for the "Eat Well. Live Well." challenge have paid off.

"I noticed an almost immediate increase in my energy level and during my eight weeks I managed to lose eight pounds," she said.

She also got support from her co-workers who walked together and shared healthy food.

"Instead of bringing in doughnuts or bagels, we had people bringing in fruit," she said. "It was one of those activities that everyone was participating in so it was easier to do."