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Employee Doug Lewin checks his tomatoes in the community garden at Mack Molding.

Come on, get healthy

Mack Molding lauded for health initiatives

By TRICIA N. HAYES

It may be better than an apple a day: Mack Molding Company has instituted employee well-being programs that offer a big payoff.

The health initiatives offered by Mack, a custom plastics molder and supplier of contract manufacturing services, are "guided by the overarching goal of encouraging employees to take personal responsibility for their health," according to Julie Horst, director of communications. The firm has Vermont offices and factories in East Arlington, Arlington and Cavendish.

The newest lifestyle initiatives were recently recognized by Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin with a Gold Workplace Wellness Award.

The community garden project, started in the spring of 2010 with 15 raised beds, has expanded to 22 beds this year. Part of a 90-acre parcel that was previously unused was turned over to the garden, complete with company-built cedar beds with nearby water access, said Horst. Mack officials worked with area growers to offer discounted seedlings.

Participation in the garden program stretches across all departments at the company, said Horst. "It was a great opportunity to get to know and interact with other employees. The project has fostered camaraderie and teamwork among employees who normally would not cross paths on a routine basis."

The company also added a volleyball court, driving range for golfers, picnic tables, barbecue grills, a trail system for hiking and/or snowshoeing, and several fruit trees (apples, plums and cherries) that employees can harvest.

Eat Right, Stay Fit is a 12-week program that encourages healthy eating habits and enduring lifestyle changes. "Employees lost over 400 pounds among 50 employees," said Horst. "Apart from the gratification that accompanies weight loss, employees were also awarded prizes," she said. "Again, mutual support and new friendships were welcome side effects."

Committed to promoting healthy behavior and disease prevention, Mack has long been an advocate for workplace wellness. Its headquarters includes a fitness center with squash and racquetball courts (volleyball—known in some places as rebound volleyball—challenges between departments are common), strength and cardio equipment, and on-site aerobic and yoga classes for employees and families.

Mack employs a full-time health-services professional who develops and implements ongoing wellness initiatives. The Walk-to-Win program, offered annually in the spring, runs for six weeks. This year, employees walked a total of 22,000 miles, with six awarded prizes such as barbecue chef tools, carving sets or lawn chairs for walking more than 300 miles each.

There is also a Holiday Challenge offered from Thanksgiving to New Year's, where employees are rewarded for not gaining weight over the holidays.

Other Mack wellness programs include Smoking Cessation programs; health screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol and Body Mass Index; vision and hearing testing; and complimentary flu shots.

Automated external defibrillators are at each of the three Vermont plant sites, and First Responder programs are taught on-site by Mack's occupational health nurse. There is injury-management training for supervisors and managers in manufacturing areas, and extensive safety training throughout the plants.

Kathy Hall, a registered nurse who is Mack's on-site medical professional, received the state's gold award for workplace wellness at the Vermont Governor's Council on Physical Fitness.

"We encourage employees to take personal responsibility for their health—eat lean, exercise regularly, practice safe work habits—and we try to offer fun, creative programs to support their efforts," said Jeff Somple, president of Mack's northern operations.

"At the end of the day, we are all health-care consumers. So, it is in everyone's best interest to make healthy lifestyle choices that will lead to more productive lives, and lower health-care costs." ♦



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