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## Wellness program works for local manufacturer Mack Molding

**KEITH WHITCOMB JR.**

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ARLINGTON -- A local medical parts manufacturer is seeing results from its various wellness programs, both in terms of savings and statewide recognition.

About 16 years ago, when Mack Molding built its "new" headquarters on Warm Brook Road, it added a fitness center. Mack Molding spokeswoman Julie Horst said that is considered the beginning of the company's concerted wellness efforts, which have expanded since.

Last week the company was presented the Gold Award through the Governor's Workplace Wellness Program, Horst said. In 2008 the company received the Bonze Award for wellness and had previously received an honorable mention. Mack's Health Services Manager Kathy Hall, a registered nurse, accepted the award from Gov. Peter Shumlin on behalf of the company.

Horst said the award is a recognition of the company's efforts.

Kevin Daily, human resources manager for Mack's Northern Operations, said the company has also seen monetary savings both in terms of health insurance rates and worker's compensation claims over the past few years.

He said that over the last decade, workers' compensation claims have dropped by 90 percent, largely because of efforts to improve work place safety, which he acknowledged wasn't good previously.

Over the past three or so years, Mack has seen its health insurance costs rise at a rate half the statewide average. Most places see double digit

increases of 12 to 15 percent annually, he said, while Mack Molding's are less. The rates are not based from discounts from the company's wellness initiatives, but rather actual claims being filed, indicating that the company's 450 to 500 employees are healthier.

Some of the initiatives include the Mack Community Garden, Horst said. Last year 15 raised beds were put in at the headquarters, along with a volleyball area and barbecue spot, as well as a hose system for the garden. Employees signed up to grow their own food, Horst said, and the recreation area was made available for them and their families.

There was also a 12-week weight loss program, in which 50 employees lost a combined total of 400 pounds. The company also has an on-site physician with office hours to hear questions and concerns from employees on their health.

Horst said Mack Molding makes an effort to engage employees about their health and encourage them to be responsible for it. She said the company's owners

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are all health-oriented, as is upper management.

"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.

Mack Molding was founded in 1920, and makes plastic parts on contract in addition to medical devices.

Contact Keith Whitcomb at [kwhitcomb@benningtonbanner.com](mailto:kwhitcomb@benningtonbanner.com).

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