

INNOVATORS

HIRSCHBACH MOTOR LINES

Dubuque, Iowa



LOOKING AFTER YOU

Hirschbach's health initiative pays dividends

BY JEFF CRISSEY

Professional drivers face many forms of stress on the job – long hours sitting behind the wheel, traffic congestion, inclement weather, angry and inattentive motorists and long detention times. When their route is finished, dining options often are limited to a handful of fast-food restaurants.

The realities of life on the road don't afford many opportunities for drivers to take care of their own health. Rates for obesity, diabetes, hypertension and smoking are nearly double those of the general population. Life expectancy for truck drivers also is significantly lower.

For carriers, the costs associated with driver lifestyle – specifically healthcare, recruiting and retention – continue to rise. In 2015, Hirschbach Motor Lines decided it was time to turn the tables on driver health to support its workforce.

“As an organization, we knew that having a wellness program would benefit our organization greatly, both in the office and for our drivers,” says Brad Pinchuk, president and chief executive officer for the Dubuque, Iowa-based fleet (*CCJ* Top 250, No. 97).

Hirschbach set out to develop results-based sustainable wellness programs for its office staff of 220 employees and 1,070 drivers. It worked with health experts Sergio Rojas, former executive director of the President's Council on Fitness and Sports, and Dr. Patricia Novick to implement separate wellness strategies for each group.

Hirschbach started its office staff program in early 2016, creating a 12-person team of health promoters from various departments, chosen for leadership qualities rather than current health status, to oversee the effort.

The team worked with Rojas and Novick for weekly one-on-one personal coaching sessions for a period of three months to learn core health principles.

In June 2016, the health promoters began training for the rest of the office employees and created teams to track health improvements and began activities such as office table-tennis tournaments, walking buddies and bringing in healthy snacks.

The office staff wellness program resulted in fewer sick days, improved work relationships, weight loss and a more positive office culture.

Hirschbach's driver wellness program began last summer with a pilot program of 36 driver participants who received weekly coaching sessions for 12 weeks. Of the 36, 28 drivers completed the program, and 27 of those showed health improvements. Results mirrored those of the office staff program, with drivers reporting they were less stressed, better rested, more focused and generally happier at work.

“I have lost 40 pounds and expect to keep losing,” said one driver participant. “I'm exercising and staying hydrated. I couldn't be more appreciative of what this program has done for me.”

Scaling up

“That success of that program was very pleasing, and we learned a lot from it, but we knew it wasn't a cost-effective way to reach our large number of drivers,” says Pinchuk of the driver wellness pilot program.

The refrigerated carrier develops holistic wellness programs that start at orientation to create a happier, healthier workforce.



Hirschbach driver Shawn C. has lost 45 pounds in three months participating in the company's driver wellness program.

Hirschbach hired Rojas full time as the company's wellness manager and began working on rolling out its wellness program to new drivers during the orientation process. Drivers complete a two-hour workshop that covers the wellness program, receive a four-page wellness manual, eat a plant-based dinner and watch a film on nutrition.

Drivers also are taken on a grocery store tour and taught how to select healthy food to take on the road and are shown how to adopt a predominantly plant-based diet with easy-to-make meals, including vegetarian stir fry, vegetarian chili and fruit smoothies.

"We take them down every aisle at the grocery store and show them the pros and cons of each food, and teach them how you can replace unhealthy foods with things like tangerines, apples and almonds and still feel satisfied," says Rojas.

At orientation, drivers can opt in for a wellness kit that includes protein shakes, a blender, mini-stepper exercise equipment and powdered

vegetables and fruit. The \$280 kit is payroll-deducted at \$20 per week.

Enrolled drivers are measured during the onboarding process and receive weekly coaching sessions for 13 weeks and then are routed in for a new round of health measurements. Drivers get half the money back after 14 weeks if they stick with the program and show health improvements in the form of weight loss, lower blood pressure, lower body mass index or smaller waist circumference. If they maintain continued health improvements after one year, they are refunded the remaining money.

So far, 65 to 70 percent of drivers in each orientation group opt in for the wellness kit, and the response by new drivers has been overwhelmingly positive, Rojas says. "We aren't here to tell them what to do, but that we care and are a resource for them," he says. "If they want to drive for a long time and provide for their families, health has to be a part of what they are doing."

Hirschbach's driver wellness pro-

gram includes dietary suggestions such as replacing caffeinated sodas and coffee with 64 to 80 ounces of water per day and practicing diaphragmatic breathing to boost energy levels, reduce stress and increase alertness.

"After stretching to increase blood circulation and diaphragmatic breathing, the drivers find it more helpful than soda or coffee, and they don't get the energy crash like they otherwise would," says Rojas.

Hirschbach also developed a wellness tab for its driver app that allows drivers to access exercise videos, nutrition tips and short documentaries on the power of diet and nutrition. It also provides updated information on what fruits and vegetables are in season and how long produce will last in the refrigerator to help drivers make smart purchases.

Since implementing its driver wellness program, Hirschbach now uses health promoters from the office to coach drivers, something Rojas says has improved relationships between office and driver staffs and makes the drivers feel more connected with the company.

Once the driver orientation wellness program is fully implemented, Hirschbach plans to develop a wellness program for its existing drivers, routing them into one of the company's three terminals for workshops.

"The wellness programs at Hirschbach for both the office and drivers has made an enormous impact in our organization," says Pinchuk. "With the holistic approach used by Rojas and Novick, coupled with an internal leadership model, this is brewing up to be a sustainable model with life long impact, not just a short-term weight-loss or get-fit program." CCJ

CCJ INNOVATORS profiles carriers and fleets that have found innovative ways to overcome trucking's challenges. If you know a carrier that has displayed innovation, contact Jeff Crissey at jcrissey@ccjmagazine.com or 800-633-5953.