

## **Passing along fitness bug**

### **CEO gets in shape, then asks employees, clients to join him**

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By David Sharos Special to The Sun

The Center for Disease Control Web site reports that in studies through 2004, two of three people in the U.S. were defined as being obese based on the body mass index formula. And while some might disagree with what the appropriate range of weight should be, there is little doubt that being overweight has contributed to higher mortality rates in the country as well as increasing the cost of health care.

In the past decade or so, major companies have taken a hard look at employee fitness versus health costs and realized it takes less money to offer employees opportunities to get in shape than to let them fend for themselves. As more information about the benefits of exercising has come out, many workers have joined health clubs or formed exercise groups, and companies have gotten on board adding workout rooms or health club memberships as one of their perks.

Dan Rigby of Naperville, CEO of Human Resources Management Systems, decided about a year ago to put a different spin on employee fitness by first taking a look at himself.

Glenn Bushong, director of marketing for HRMS, said the leader of his company became inspired to improve his own health after a friend of Rigby's promised he'd help.

"Dan was overweight, he smoked, had high cholesterol and blood pressure - a lot of the typical issues that people have if they don't take care of themselves," Bushong said. "A friend of Dan's took it upon himself to help him and made it his personal mission to get Dan in shape.

From 266 pounds to 188, Rigby hasn't looked back, getting his race start at 45 years old in the 2006 Naperville triathlon.

"Eventually, Dan worked himself up to the point where he competed in a half iron-man race, and while he didn't do well, he did finish," Bushong said. "And then he decided he wanted to try and inspire others to do the same."

#### **Training mission**

HRMS has become the leading sponsor of Naperville's annual Sprint Triathlon Race, and Rigby's idea was to motivate his employees, as well his company's clients involved in fitness and training, for the race.

"We kicked off the idea about providing training for everyone who wanted to participate, including our clients and their employees, as well as providing support and gear for those who wanted to get involved," Bushong said. "At our first meeting this February, we had 125 people show up and the same number came for our second meeting in March."

Rigby, who had been working with a personal trainer, used the same person to help coordinate workouts for the employee and client triathlon groups. On Aug. 10 when the Naperville race took place, 64 of these athletes, many who were neophytes, finished.

Valerie Adams, a communications specialist for HRMS who oversaw the development of the workout initiative, said she was "amazed at the reaction of people" despite being skeptical at first.

"So many of these people were first-time participants and were not athletes or exercising whatsoever, and I think a lot of them saw this as an opportunity to finally do something," Adams said. "Dan (Rigby) got together with them and the trainers he hired, and together, they convinced others they could do it."

Exercise routines were filmed at a local field house so that Rigby's recruits could see proper techniques for stretching and other training tips.

Confidence booster

One of the new recruits is Beth Laken, 53, who works as the comptroller for North Central College. Laken said she lost her father to cancer and wanted to become more active for many reasons.

"I lost my dad in February to cancer and since it runs in the family, I wanted to see what I could do about becoming healthier," Laken said. "I was also grieving the loss of my father, so I saw this as kind of a 'cleansing mission'. This is really the first time I've ever exercised, and I am planning to continue."

Adams said the health benefits to those who took on the exercise challenge also have produced positive results in the work place - outcomes other companies often report once their employees start becoming more active.

"I've heard a number of stories from people since we started this program about how amazed they were regarding the benefits and how they are encouraging others to get started in programs of their own," she said. "People seem to feel better about themselves."