Hy-Capacity wellness program shares its success story

By Phil Monson

Humboldt’s Jay Gould has lost over 80 pounds the last two years and he credits the wellness program of his employer, Hy-Capacity of Humboldt, as a key incentive. Gould’s success story is just one of many inside the company, where employees have benefited from the creation of a wellness team in 2008.

While employee participation in the wellness program isn’t mandatory, about 75 percent take part and have improved their health through various forms of exercise, recreational activity and improved nutritional habits.

“Our goal was to develop a wellness program that increased awareness of the benefits of healthy habits and make it easy and fun to participate in. We wanted to be educated in how making healthy choices in our everyday life can have a positive impact on our overall health,” Molly Varangkounh, company vice-president, said.

“We’ve done many things with our wellness program,” Wellness coordinator and 15-year employee Jeri Lane said. “We do wellness screening, which is optional, not required. Hy-Capacity paid the cost. Trinity Regional staff came in and took our measurements, height, weight, blood pressure and the stats to get a baseline. From there we do it on a yearly basis to measure our improvement.”

“We’ve seen a lot of improvement,” Lane said. Indeed, Cholesterol testing shows 28 out of 50 employees saw an improvement in their overall cholesterol levels while the percentage of total employees with high blood pressure went down from 20 percent to eight percent. The total weight loss was 130 pounds. Lane says the information demonstrates a decrease in risks associated with many chronic diseases for employees.

“It’s working. You track it and have people inspiring you to get out and do something. It’s making a difference,” Lane said.

“Our team meets monthly. We try to come up with ideas and ways for people to do something to encourage being more active,” Lane said. “You try to find other things outside of work for people to be involved rather than going home, sitting down and eating ice cream in from of the TV.”

The company has also participated in the Live Healthy Iowa statewide initiative.

“We’ve done the 100-day challenge for two years,” Lane said. “We just finished the Burst Your Thirst program, another aspect of Live Healthy Iowa. In September we began the Next Step program which each team member can track individually.”

“We also did our own walking program last winter, partly because of the 100-day challenge program but also because we want people to walk and keep healthy all year long. So we pre-empted that with an 8,000-step program,” Lane said.

“Each participant puts in a couple of dollars for a pedometer and Hy-Capacity pays the rest,” Lane said. “We’ve had some people sign up for Live Healthy Iowa in the past, but they might not do anything with it. We feel people may actually have more to do with it by paying some of their own money.”

“As incentive for our walking program, we give out gift cards to places like Subway. If you participate each week and you met each of the weekly goals for the entire program, you get a gift card and an hour of paid time off with the company,” Lane said. “It was a very successful program.”

For Barb Wiuff, employed 16 years, the program is just what she needed at this point in her life.

“I needed to lose some weight. Plus I had a lot of health issues. I needed somebody to lead me through that process. I couldn’t have done it by myself,” Wiuff said.

“I have lost some weight and people have helped me get into the mood to walk or do exercise and it makes you feel better in the long run to lose weight,” Wiuff said.

Jamie Danielson, employed two years, teaches yoga and dance. Danielson’s expertise has been helpful, but she admits the program has given her a boost.

“I like to be active on my own. I teach yoga. I teach dance and I run. I want to help other people do that with the benefit of all types of exercise and promote wellness, whether it be exercise or breathing techniques to calm people down,” Danielson said.

“I like to share secrets and success stories like Jay and Barb. It makes me feel good to have them feel good. I like the aspect of helping other people,” Danielson said.

“I have noticed when we have a workout program, sometimes a person gets a little sluggish or stagnant. With a program like this, it gets you excited about getting back into it and pushing harder,” long-time employee Ken Bratland said.

“I’ve always done something but this program has given me an energy boost and encourages me more to stick with it.”

Gould says the aspect of the program providing motivation and support is immense.

“Everybody wants to live healthy and get into better condition, but it’s hard to motivate yourself to do it,” Gould said. “If you work out in groups or you get together in groups, you are depending on everybody to come together and others are depending on you. If you are doing it in a group, you don’t want to let the other group members down,” Gould said.

“That’s the incentive in its own way. When you work in groups. You help each other out. You inspire each other. Some people like to work out by themselves. But to get going, it’s nice to have a group to help you get set up and keep going,” Gould said.

“I like to walk. I walk a lot. I go anywhere from eight miles in the morning to two. I walk outside when I can when the weather is nice. We have two treadmills at our house. My wife and I both work out,” Gould said. “We’ve had four or five people come over to work out and we’ve switched to different things.”

“I like to walk and I get to do a lot of thinking when I go walking. I have a weight machine at the house,” Gould said. “Right now we are remodeling the garage into an exercise room so once winter sets in, we should be able to work out there.”

“Jay is our inspiration,” fellow employee Kris Balk said. “I’ve lost weight since I joined up and it’s really great to have people around you like Barb and Jay. You see what they’ve done and it’s an inspiration for you. It’s nice to get the pat on the back and have people say something like ‘you are looking good’ or ‘your jeans are getting baggy’ or whatever. It makes you feel good.”

“I enjoy the burst for thirst program because I am a big water drinker. I think it’s important to get
everybody to drink water. It fills you up,” Balk said. “The Live Healthy Iowa program has great meal plans and recipes you can try, whether it’s low-fat or low-calorie.”

“When we first started a couple of years ago, I weighed 267 pounds and eventually I got down into the 180s. If you keep at it, you can do it,” Gould said. “You don’t look in the mirror one day and see a thinner you. It’s gradual. And that goes both ways, whether you are gaining weight or losing weight. It doesn’t happen overnight.”

Gould says having a schedule works best for him to stay on track.

“I have a schedule. I track myself on my charts. Every morning I walk to work. Do some work here and then I walk back home. Then I walk to work for the day then I walk back home again at night,” Gould said. “At night after the boys are in bed, I’ll walk again for an hour, I’ll get on the bike for 30 minutes and then I’ll do a 45-minute tape or DVD or a boot camp workout, a cardio blast or some type of workout program.”

“And I also watch what goes in in what I eat,” Gould said. “That’s the biggest difference for me. When we started this I started watching calories. You can eat at night, but it can’t be junk food.”

Gould’s walking distance from his home on the 300 block of South Second Street in Humboldt to the company plant is 2.17 miles one way. So every morning it’s 6.5 miles he covers.

“I can’t put in the amount of time Jay puts into his walking. I like to jump in and hit a workout hard, run or do interval training for 30 minutes and then be done with it,” Bratland said.

“I can’t do it on my own. I need to do it with other people,” Wiuff said. “Today I feel so much more better than before I got involved in this program. I have a lot more energy during the day, along with the weight loss.”

“They are an inspiration for me, too. I am a person who likes to work out by myself, but when I see or hear about the others, I like to be a cheerleader and help them out and it also encourages me to keep working, too,” Danielson said. “I’ve never been a big water drinker so this has forced me to become a water drinker. I have given up coffee. We all have bad habits and first you have to identify a bad habit and find new solutions for them.”

“We’ve had speakers come in and give us information on eating good things, cutting down or eliminating pop and coffee from our diets,” Danielson said.

Lane says Hy-Capacity has 14 teams involved with Live Healthy Iowa. A total of 77 out of 110 employees took part in the summer.

“With the burst for thirst program we had 18 teams. We actually had two teams in the top 20 in the state of Iowa. Jay and Barb were on the team that ranked 15th. The team I was on ranked 17th in the state of Iowa,” Lane said.

“We had the walking program with 71 participants. You don’t know how much you walk until you get the pedometer on, then you know how much you are walking. And when you have a goal on how much you need to walk, you go farther and try to meet your goal when you go home at night and realize ‘I’m only 200 steps away.’ So I go outside and reach my goal for the day. It motivates you,” Lane said.

“Having a goal to reach is so much better than not having a goal. When you have to keep track and stay on a goal path, and if you have other team members waiting on you, it’s motivating for me when I see that I’m doing something and my teammates are watching me,” Lane said.

The company has a nutritionist from Trinity Regional Health Center come and conduct quarterly talks on reading food labels, calorie intake and control. Hy-Capacity also promotes using the West River Recreation Center.

“We have a daily meeting with our supervisors and one of the topics is wellness. Hopefully people can find some information from that which they can take back to their teams,” Lane said.

Gould says knowledge has been golden for him.

“What opened up my eyes is when we started looking at the labels,” Gould said. “A pack of jumbo hot dogs at the grocery store — they are like 290 calories per hot dog. Wow. You don’t think about that unless you start looking at it.”

“A bag of chips is 300 calories. It’s amazing. If people start watching their labels, that will help them a lot,” Gould said.

“Smaller portions make a difference,” Balk said.

“I think a lot of people don’t know how to get started to eating better and living healthier, so this has provided a guideline for people to get going,” Bratland said. “I think a lot of people want to look healthy and feel better but they don’t know how to go about it. This program gives people guidance.”