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Wellness Benefits for Employees Perking in Popularity

At Paylocity, an Elk Grove Village-based payroll processing company, employees can get a better rate on their health insurance if they take steps to keep themselves healthy, such as undergoing routine testing and meeting goals for conditions such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

The firm is one of many small businesses offering perks known as wellness benefits in hopes of lowering their health-care costs and promoting a happier and more productive work environment. And, in turn, making themselves more attractive to prospective employees.

President Steve Sarowitz, who is a believer in taking care of your health, said his company hopes to lower its health-care costs. So Paylocity is contracting with a company that creates and administers employee wellness programs.

But Sarowitz said he is not looking to be Big Brother.

"We were very concerned when we implemented this that it be a positive experience for our employees as well," he said.

At PetSafe Inc., employees can earn points toward gift certificates by going to the gym and the doctor.

And at Eastern Financial Florida Credit Union in Miramar, staffers get \$100 toward their annual health club fees.

PetSafe, a pet products company based in Knoxville, Tenn., has a program that awards points to workers who go to the doctor, donate blood, work out in a gym or take wellness classes. Laurie Macnair, PetSafe's director of talent development, said that at the end of each quarter staffers can redeem their points for movie passes, lunches, even gift certificates of up to \$100.

Macnair said the idea for PetSafe's wellness benefits actually originated with staffers. But the company has agreed to sponsor the various parts of the program, which also includes weight loss contests and paying for smoking cessation aids such as nicotine patches. It has also built a gym that is free for all employees.

Rob Wilson, president of Employco, a Chicago-based human resources firm, says wellness benefits are becoming more popular, although he is not seeing any of his small-business clients saving money on health care.

Wilson says there nonetheless is great value in offering such benefits to workers.