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## Workplace wellness a benefit

Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz said the international coffeehouse chain spends more on health care for employees than it spends on coffee.

At \$300 million a year, that's a lot of beans ... and bucks.

As health care costs continue to rise, businesses bear much of the expense.

Workplace wellness programs are gaining popularity among CEOs because they make good business sense.

A recent study published in the Harvard Business Review ("What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs?" December 2010) reports that for every dollar invested in smart workplace wellness programs up to \$6 in savings was realized among companies studied.

Businesses with wellness programs may see savings through lower health care costs, reduced absenteeism, greater productivity, higher morale and lower turnover.

Investing in the health of a company's most valuable asset—its employees—benefits both the employers' and the employees' bottom line.

## Oklahoma's 'Certified Healthy' program

To recognize businesses that provide health and wellness opportunities for employees, in 2003 the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, Oklahoma Turning Point Council, the State Chamber, and Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) launched the Oklahoma Certified Healthy Business program.

The intent of the program, according to Neil Hann, OSDH's Chief of Community Development Service, was "to provide businesses with guidelines and criteria they could follow to develop a healthy work environment for employees, from sharing educational material to creating policies to encourage employees to eat better, move more and be tobacco free."

Because most Oklahomans spend a significant amount of time at work, Hann said it made sense to emphasize policies that encourage a healthy workplace environment.

An added benefit is that when employees participate in healthy activities at work, it can translate into healthier habits at home.

The program expanded this year and is accepting "Certified Healthy" applications in five categories: Business, campus, community, restaurant and school. The applications are only available online ([www.okturningpoint.org](http://www.okturningpoint.org)) and are due Nov. 1.



Johnathon Ford gives workplace wellness a thumbs up as he and other Indian Capital Technology Center employees walk the halls for fun and extra exercise.

## **ICTC makes employee wellness count**

Indian Capital Technology Center has earned the “Certified Healthy Business” designation for the past three years.

Lana Reed, ICTC’s business and entrepreneurial services industrial coordinator, said she first learned of the program from Martha Alford, a health educator at Muskogee County Health Department, who encouraged ICTC to apply.

In filling out the application, Reed realized that ICTC had been promoting health and wellness among employees, students and the community for years, but that it was time to do even more.

ICTC created a healthy business committee to develop a wellness plan, advocate healthier options and activities, and communicate wellness information.

The school has since sponsored employee wellness days with free health screenings, hosted three staff Biggest Loser contests, partnered with OSU Extension for healthy cooking classes, offered on-site yoga classes, held a breast cancer awareness day, marked an indoor walking track, produced an award-winning internal wellness newsletter and added healthier options to vending machines.

“It’s been a real team effort with full support from the top,” Reed said.

She sees colleagues eat healthier and walk during breaks, and she believes the program has injected excitement, support and collaboration into getting healthier.

## **Local resources for workplace wellness**

Workplace wellness programs don’t have to be costly to be effective. Many low-cost and no-cost resources are available to jump-start a healthier workplace.

The Muskogee Wellness Initiative (MWI) and the Greater Muskogee Area Chamber of Commerce are teaming up to encourage and support local business efforts to promote wellness at work. The new Muskogee Chamber Health and Wellness Task Force, chaired by Muskogee Regional Medical Center CEO Kevin Fowler, will be a resource and idea exchange for Chamber members pursuing workplace wellness.

MWI’s new website ([www.MuskogeeWellness.org](http://www.MuskogeeWellness.org)) offers a free, practical and confidential tool to help workplace wellness programs track health progress and motivate employees.

A free “Make It Your Business” workplace wellness training will be offered from 8 to 9:30 a.m. Sept. 22 at Muskogee County Health Department. Participants will receive a valuable tool kit with practical resources, program ideas and sample policies to help businesses cost-effectively create a healthier workplace.

Workplace wellness programs lead to healthier, happier, more productive employees.

That’s a smart investment of bucks ... no beans about it.

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