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## **Employers receive recognition as certified healthy businesses**

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Transcript Managing Editor

Seventeen Norman employers recently have received recognition as certified healthy businesses, it was announced this past week.

The honors came at a breakfast sponsored by Norman Regional Health System and the Oklahoma Turning Point Council. Three employers shared tips on getting employees into shape and encouraged others to become certified healthy businesses.

"Be prepared to take the heat," Chris Davis, SYSCO Oklahoma president, told the assembled business leaders. He described his company's efforts to support weight loss, smoking cessation and overall healthier lifestyles among its 320 associates.

The company became smoke free, started a walking program and WeightWatchers groups, held health fairs, sponsored exercise and Pilates sessions and promoted healthy snacks.

They've lost more than 1,500 pounds. Additionally, the company pays employees to quit smoking. Davis personally lost weight and has recently completed his first marathon.

"You have to care more about your associates' health than their feelings," he said.

Norman Regional President and CEO David Whitaker said the hospital got interested in wellness when it recognized it could not preach healthy habits without adopting some of its own.

"The tipping point is the cost of providing health care for our employees," he said.

He urged employers to support weight loss efforts, hold health screenings, smoking cessation and exercise programs and to routinely applaud and share personal success stories. "Those spread like wildfire," he said.

"Wellness programs just make good business sense," Whitaker said. "We have seen an absolute improvement in the overall health of our employees."

John Hunter, superintendent of Moore Norman Technology Center, thanked the hospital, the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals and his school's human resources department.

He said 60 percent of the technology center's employees are active in some form of wellness. He described one employee who had lost 100 pounds.

"It's been life changing for her," he said.

Julie Knutson of the Academy for State Goals said the healthy business initiative came out of a Town Hall meeting where participants discussed and made recommendations to improve Oklahoma's overall health.

"Health governs how much companies want to participate in this state," she said.

Since the recognition began in 2003, 340 businesses have been recognized. In 2007, 94 applicants were certified with 17 of them being from Norman.

"Norman really is doing well in spreading the word about this program," she said.