



COMMENTARY - Casey Cowell

theTCBN

When it Comes to Attracting Great Workers, Health Is Wealth

Our culture is pretty unhealthy. A third of Michiganders are obese. That's the tenth worst in the U.S., tied with Indiana. Colorado, with which we often compete for highly productive and creative workers and businesses, weighs in at 22 percent obese, the lowest in the U.S. That's an advantage for them and a disadvantage for us. It's incredibly expensive to be unhealthy. Obese adults spend 42 percent more on direct health-care costs than adults who are a healthy weight. The indirect costs of obesity are even more significant.

Let's seize the advantage and invest the savings in far better ways. Some companies are doing it right here, right now. Take a look.

Thompson Surgical

Dan Farley bought Thompson Surgical with a \$6,000 inheritance 30 years ago. He assembled a great team and built Thompson into one of the world's leading suppliers of surgical devices and instruments right here in Traverse City. The really great part for us is that they sell their products to markets all over the world with the economic gain flowing right into our community.

Thompson Surgical is a healthful place to work. It is noticeable by the positive attitude you encounter when you walk through their front door. The place looks and feels healthy. It is noticeable when you see that work surfaces are adjustable and that everyone can work standing up if they wish.

Thompson gives about \$250 per year to each employee for them to use to advance their own health and fitness.

"It encourages and inspires our people to be active," said Farley. "Join a fitness club, buy a pair of snowshoes, that sort of thing."

He takes his employees' health seriously.

"Why? Because it's great for our company. Healthy people have more positive attitudes which makes them

better, more natural and more effective team players. They're more productive," he said. "They're ill less often and miss less work. Healthfulness pays!"

TentCraft

Another example is Matt Bulloch and TentCraft. After an early career as an investment banker, he decided that he wanted to own a business. Eleven years ago, Paul Britten invited him to Traverse City to consider options. For Matt, it was love at first sight ... with Traverse City, that is. He really likes to be active outdoors and on the water and loves our vibrant culture. Matt came on board, starting a division within Britten Banners to make custom tents for marketing campaigns and events. In 2015, Matt acquired the division from Britten and now employs close to 100. Like Thompson Surgical, these products, created and manufactured here, are shipped to broad geographic markets with the economic gains flowing back to our community.

TentCraft's purchasing of materials and services and the economic participation of its entire workforce is a real boost to our local economy. This is where they live, spend, save and

invest their money.

Like Thompson Surgical, when you enter TentCraft you immediately sense that the environment seems all about healthfulness. The Infants in the Workplace program allows parents to bring their newborns with them to work, eliminating much of the angst, anguish and complications so often encountered within young families.

Bulloch is extremely proud of this.

"It is readily apparent in the attitudes of our people that everyone appreciates this support for our families. I believe it pays huge dividends in teamwork and productivity," he said. "Moms are back to work sooner and are with their babies, which is really important. This program has been a huge success."

When you enter the common room of

TentCraft you are struck by how the walls are lined with kayaks, bikes, stand-up paddleboards and snowshoes, available to all at any time.

"I regularly encourage our people to exercise. It moderates emotional swings and fosters a positive work/life balance which makes people more productive," Bulloch said. "We firmly believe that a healthy workforce is a better workforce. Right now, there is so much unhealthiness out there that being a healthy workforce is a competitive advantage. We're focusing on this and everyone is better off for it!"

Munson Healthcare

Munson Healthcare (MHC) comprises nine hospitals covering 26 counties, supporting a patient population of about 550,000. It has recently launched a system-wide effort called Choose to Be Well. You will soon see it advertised throughout our region. Shape Up North (SUN) is the community health effort within MHC. The SUN website is loaded with information and resources to aid you in leading your enterprise in a more healthful direction. You will find a full spectrum of resources, from healthy recipes to fun activities to get you moving to ways to create more healthful policies at work! Reach out to Christi Nowak and Alyson Kass at SUN for advice and ideas.

Healthy communities thrive while unhealthy ones wither away as they lose the attention of people looking to find a home for their new and vibrant ideas. These are the very people that will make our companies and our community grow stronger.

To live here in Traverse City is truly a gift. We are surrounded by the most spectacular environment in the world. Our backyard beckons and cheers us on to hike, bike, swim and paddle our way to a healthy lifestyle. Let's dig in on becoming fit and healthy. This isn't that complicated. A little education and assistance on having a more nutritious diet and a little encouragement to take a 25-minute walk every day can go a long way. The hardest step is just taking that first step. Think about what you can do to make a start for your team and take that first step!

Casey Cowell is a tech entrepreneur, philanthropist and startup investor. He is a principal of local investment group Boomerang Catapult, LLC and a director of Munson Healthcare, Interlochen Center for the Arts and Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities.

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CORRECTION

In the February "Making It In Northern Michigan" feature, we inaccurately stated that Grayling-based commercial construction/installation firm IMM, Inc. is building a new foundry for EJ (formerly East Jordan Iron Works). We apologize for the error.

theTCBN

EDITORIAL & BUSINESS OFFICE
129 E. Front St. Suite 200
Traverse City, Michigan 49684
(231) 929-7919

ON THE WEB
tcbusinessnews.com

PUBLISHER
Luke W. Haase
lhaase@tcbusinessnews.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Gayle Neu
gneu@tcbusinessnews.com

COPY EDITOR
Becky Kalajian

AD SALES
Mike Bright
mike@northernexpress.com
Lisa Gillespie
lisa@northernexpress.com
Kathy Johnson
kathy@northernexpress.com
Katy McCain
katy@northernexpress.com
Todd Norris
tnorris@tcbusinessnews.com
Michele Young
myoung@tcbusinessnews.com

ART DIRECTION
Rogers Advertising

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Ross Boissoneau
Lynn Geiger
Mary Bevans Gillett
Rick Haglund
Amy Lane
Craig Manning
Clark Miller
Al Parker

WEB PRODUCTION
Byte Productions

DISTRIBUTION
Gary Twardowski

SERVING:
Grand Traverse, Kalkaska,
Leelanau and Benzie counties

The Traverse City Business News
Published monthly by
Eyes Only Media, LLC
129 E. Front St., Suite 200
Traverse City, MI 49684
Periodical postage qualification pending
at Traverse City, MI. POSTMASTER: Send
address changes to The Traverse City
Business News, PO Box 1810, Traverse
City, MI 49685-1810.

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