

# Local incentives promote wellness

## ■ Programs encourage employees' awareness of better health and fitness choices.

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Employees of Cass County Electric can get up to \$80 on a gift card each year by exercising, taking part in a 10-kilometer race, getting a yearly physical or having their teeth cleaned.

Some of the electric cooperative's 100 employees can also earn up to \$400 annually for their flexible spending or health savings account by being tobacco-free, completing a health screening and having blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol readings within an acceptable range, or by learning about

their health issues.

"Our goal is to get people aware of it and get it taken care of," said Linda Otterson, manager of human resources. "We're trying to do more of a reward-based program than a penalty program."

Local incentive wellness programs aren't as much about the number on the scale as they are about encouraging awareness and healthy behaviors, said Mike Peschel, sales director at Courts Plus Fitness Center.

One common way local employers give incentives to employees is by reimbursing gym memberships. Some fund their own programs, while others operate through insurance companies.

Mike Carlson, director of

wellness for Blue Cross Blue Shield, said there are about 150,000 eligible members for its health club credit program, which rewards 12 monthly trips to the gym with \$20. About 6 to 8 percent receive the credit on a monthly basis. This is slightly higher than the national average, he said.

Blue Cross also offers an online health tool, My Health Center. Eligible members can receive up to \$250 a year through the health club credit, the online tool or a combination of both.

Blue Cross Blue Shield employees also receive reimbursements for entry fees to races or recreational leagues.

At Choice Financial, employees can fill out a

form each month listing their physical activities, nutrition and other healthy choices. Points are tallied and rewarded with cash, from \$10 to \$50, said Cheryl Feltman, the company's wellness coordinator.

Choice Financial also paid for employees' registration fees for Fargo Marathon events.

Lynn Paulson, the bank's chief executive officer, said offering these incentives is the socially responsible thing to do, and makes sense for the bottom line.

"Seventy-five percent of health care costs are caused by conscience lifestyle choices," he said. "It does take a change in behavior."

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