

Missing Economic Piece Time for Communities to Adopt Wellness Strategy

By Jay Julian

Having been born and raised in Indiana, I know it is a great place to live and to raise a family. We are fortunate to have a business climate that is very conducive to encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting growth in existing businesses.

Over the last decade, our state has been aggressive in seeking new organizations to relocate here and helping our current businesses expand. Indiana consistently is mentioned in polls and magazines as a wonderful place to do business, a great place to visit and an affordable place to live.

If there were a wish list of things we could do to improve ourselves and make Indiana an even more attractive place to live and work, here is what I would put high on that list: Improve our lifestyles by making healthier choices.

Normally, ranking near the top of any list is a good thing. Indiana, however, occupies those spots in a few categories that are not something to be proud of: smoking, obesity and poor fitness. We need to become known as a healthy state and to be ranked accordingly. How do we do this? Knowing the facts is a good starting point.

Adding up the price tag

The Centers for Disease Control states that each smoker employed will cost an employer about \$3,400 more than a non-smoker. With smoking rates in Indiana between 20% and 25%, simple math tells us that in a 100-person company the chances are that 20% of them are smokers. At an additional \$3,400 per smoker, that accounts for \$68,000 in unnecessary spending by the organization. Similar costs are also associated with obesity and overall poor fitness.

Health care costs are and will continue to be one of the most expensive – but controllable – budgetary items for employers. This has an economic impact on each of us as well as our state.

Simple changes in lifestyles, though, can yield amazing improvements in the overall health and well-being of our employees. Muncie-Delaware County, along with many other communities, is beginning to tackle this problem.

Muncie-Delaware County is working as a community to promote wellness. Here are just a few things being done to improve the numbers:

- We have a smoking ordinance that is one of the most comprehensive in the state
- We have an outstanding rails to trails system, great bike trails and newly established bike lanes
- We have taken the lead to make Muncie-Delaware County one of the first to receive the Indiana Healthy Community recognition from the Wellness Council of Indiana

We have great community partners – government, business/industry, human resource organizations, media groups and the chamber to name a few – that are taking an active role in changing our statistics.

It takes encouragement, strategy, desire and a lot of effort to make the healthier choice the easier choice. By building the infrastructure, encouraging better health and changing our lives by changing our habits, we are certain that being an Indiana Healthy Community will have a positive and sustaining impact on economic development in the Muncie-Delaware County area.



Jay Julian

INFORMATION LINK

Author: Jay Julian is president and CEO of the Muncie-Delaware County Chamber of Commerce and chief economic development officer of the Muncie-Delaware County Economic Development Alliance. He can be contacted at www.muncie.com