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HEALTH

**ORCHID, JOHN'S ISLAND
EMBRACE EMPLOYEE WELLNESS**

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Orchid, John's Island embrace employee wellness

BY SIOBHAN MCDONOUGH
Staff Writer

Diana Rugani sits at her desk during most of her 40-hour work week, crunching out numbers, and meeting tight deadlines on Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club's accounting staff.

A car accident 20 years ago compromised her back so sitting for long periods is not ideal for the 50-year-old Vero Beach woman. "When I don't work out I'm in a lot of pain," said Rugani, in office attire and sneakers just back from a one-mile walk with colleagues.

Rugani is one of 100 full-time employees and 50 seasonal ones at the upscale island club who are now entitled to an array of fitness classes, nutritional meals and discussions on health and wellness before and after work. The program started in January after General Manager Rob Tench signed a "CEO Pledge" on behalf of his staff.

John's Island Club also signed the pledge and offers a similar wellness program to its employees.

The CEO Pledge is part of a campaign

by the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity and Prevo Health Solutions that encourages CEOs to recognize physical activity as an important driver of employee health as well as business performance.

"If there is one thing I've learned in all my years in the club industry, it's that the member experience depends on a happy and healthy staff," Tench said. "The dedicated employees of Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club spend a lot of time here, and deserve a positive, healthy work environment."

The club had already focused on health, nutrition and wellness for its employees by offering limited off-season fitness hours and classes the last two years. With the recent pledge, however, the club's commitment to influencing physical activity and promoting a culture of wellness has been extended year-round.

"The whole idea behind the pledge is to try to improve the physical and mental health of your staff, to help them feel better and healthier and be more productive," said Tench. "It's a

big positive. It is helpful to us if we have healthier people engaged in healthy things and physical activity." Besides, he added, "it'll help keep our health insurance costs down, which is one of the biggest expenses of the operation. It's a win-win for the club and team."

Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club consists of 310 West Indies-style homes and 66 oceanfront condominiums and is located on 600 acres in the town of Orchid. It has a championship Arnold Palmer golf course, tennis and wellness center, year-round golf and tennis tournaments, club activities and social gatherings. It has several dining facilities at its beach club, golf club and poolside grill.

Scores of executives at companies, associations and schools have joined the CEO Pledge program, including such well known entities as Wegman's Food Markets, the University of Miami, the University of Central Florida, the League of American Bicyclists, Johnson & Johnson, Florida Hospital Foundations, and Clif Bar & Co.

The wellness program is based on



Denise Duda, Diana Rugani, Larry Hoffman, Diane Appleby, and Rob Tench. PHOTOS BY LEAH DUBOIS

the premise that a healthy workforce is one where employees are eating nutritious food and moving about, making physical activity a part of each day, walking together in peer groups, engaging in wellness programs, developing friendships – reaping benefits of physical activity and good health.

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Staff “ambassadors” promote daily or weekly wellness messages to their department team members. They may work one-on-one with team members who need direction, help in understanding the program goals and objectives; and keep the department updated on events, activities and seminars.

The initiative includes providing healthy meal choices, offering monthly training and information sessions, golf and tennis clinics, bike rides, fitness walks, community runs, nutrition classes and healthy cooking classes.

Rugani, who has lost 10 lbs. since jumping on the bandwagon in January shortly after the CEO Pledge was signed, said coffee used to be flowing in her office. Not anymore. “I feel more aware and more awake. Now I don’t need that coffee or candy bar to get past 2 p.m.”

As added incentive, the program involves a point system in which employees can earn points to become eligible for monthly drawings for a \$25, \$50 or \$75 gift certificate. Employees accumulate points by attending workshops, participating in workouts and eating healthy, both at work and home. Employees are encouraged to involve their family members as well, and can accrue points by doing so.

Denise Duda, Director of Fitness, Wellness and Spa at Orchid, heads up the employee wellness initiative. “We pump them up and get them excited about the program,” she said.

Duda estimates that 20 percent of employees are taking advantage of the program, and thinks more will as the season winds down and opportunities grow for staff off-season.

“The idea is to get their mindset to change from sedentary to moving, concentrate on how to get more energy at work, a healthier lifestyle at home and work, how to involve their family,” Duda said.

Larry Hoffman, a full-time employee, has experienced a boost in energy after shedding 20 lbs. due to the program and self-discipline.

As property manager, Hoffman, 55 of Palm City, spends about two-thirds of his work day sitting and addressing members’ requests. “Having professional trainers tell you how to work out right helped me enormously,” he said.

Before, he would ride his bicycle casually around his housing complex. But when he started attending training sessions at Orchid, he learned that it was important to add resistance and vary his regimen. With that, he saw vast improvements in his fitness level.

“You get results when you learn how to do things the right way. I wasn’t getting my heart rate up. I feel great all the time,” he said. “You don’t realize what a difference having fewer pounds on your body to carry around makes.”

One of the keys for Hoffman was the convenience factor, being able to drop into the fitness facility right after work, on-site. If he went home, he’d never go out to a fitness center to work out.

Rick Ladendorf, president of Prevo Health Solutions and facilitator of the CEO Pledge in the private club industry said, Tench and his executive staff are “sending a message that they are committed to employee health and well-being by emphasizing physical fitness and proper nutrition as key drivers in health.”

The wellness efforts seem to be paying off as the club has recently received

industry recognition from Board Room Magazine as a Distinguished Emerald Club of the World, and as one of America’s Healthiest Clubs from Prevo Health Solutions.

John’s Island Club was also ranked one of America’s Healthiest Clubs and signed the CEO Pledge as well, according to assistant general manager David Colclough.

Its 540 employees – 230 of whom are year-round – have access to healthy choices and low-calorie meals in the employee cafeteria. And each spring, the club hosts a health screening day during which doctors and nurses take

blood pressure and discuss health issues, and dietitians talk about proper nutrition.

Financial advisers discuss various topics to ease those kinds of stressors and massage therapists offer their services for the aches and pains of the body as well.

The club also offers discounts to local fitness centers for its employees and has a running club.

“We care about our employees,” said Colclough. “This promotes longevity and loyalty. But the most important thing is that it’s the right thing to do.” ■

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