



## St. Cloud area ranks above state in well-being



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(Photo: Jason Wachter, [jwachter@stcloudtimes.com](mailto:jwachter@stcloudtimes.com))

Business and community leaders received a pat on the back Wednesday at the Greater St. Cloud Workplace Well-Being Summit, as well as push to do even better.

Results from a survey of local employees showed they reported higher well-being than the state of Minnesota, and in many cases, the nation.

Local results of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index survey were announced Wednesday at the River's Edge Convention Center.

Hundreds of community and business leaders gathered to hear how a focus on well-being can improve employee health and happiness, as well as the company's bottom line.

Improved well-being has been shown to reduce absenteeism and spending on short-term disability; increase employee presence, productivity and job performance; and lower health care spending, according to Dana Williams, senior vice president of Healthways.

"I think the St. Cloud community has a great start. They have a great foundation to begin with. On par, they are well ahead of most communities I see. What comes next is how do they want to optimize it," he said. "The hardest part is always starting. Then you gotta keep the momentum around it," Williams said.

The survey measured five kinds of well-being: purpose, social, financial, community and physical. It is meant to capture how people feel about and experience their daily lives. About 60 percent of eligible respondents completed the survey, which is on the high end for the survey in its first year.

Minnesota consistently ranks among the top five states for well-being in the nation.

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"I think it's great that we have a high starting point. ... And yet there's a series of specific well-being challenges or risks that we can address," said, Rick Bauerly, chair of the Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.'s workplace well-being initiative and corps.

He expected high ranking, because Minnesota is typically ranked highly in health care measures.

But the percentage of overweight and obese people in the area did surprise him. It was well above the state and nation. He realizes that's a nationwide trend.

"That is at least a 10-year journey for employers to think about," he said. "I think the work environment can be supportive of solutions, and it can actually be the cause of some of the stress."

The percent of respondents who said they lived with worry was above the state and national levels. The percent living with stress was on par with the state and nation at about 43 percent. And about 13 percent reported depression in their lifetime.

Those three things together are something to think about, Bauerly said.

When it came to finances, more than a third of respondents said they had worried about money in the past seven days.

"Forget about benchmarks. In absolute terms, that's a lot of us worrying about our financial security. That has to undermine performance at the workplace," he said.

Williams outlined some areas for improvement gleaned from the survey. That includes improving nutrition and increasing access to fruits and vegetables. He also said there was room for more recognition of people working to improve their own and the community's well-being.

More good news? People like where they live. Compared with the state and nation, the area had a much higher portion of survey respondents who reported they couldn't imagine living in a better community than the one they live in today.

This year, the summit drew were 425 participants from 193 organizations, both up roughly 50 percent from last year.

"We're broadening the base and gaining momentum," Bauerly said.



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He said that bodes well for the sustainability of the project. A broad base also means broad funding sources. People sign on for three-year commitments, reinforcing that the program is meant to continue for years to come.

"The culture is changing in ways that there's a yearning for thinking about health and well-being in the workplace ... and the community," Bauerly said.

CentraCare Health has been part of the trend of managing the health of a population, instead of focusing on the individual, said Dr. Ken Holmen, president and CEO of CentraCare. The goal is to improve health, affordability and patient experience.

Some ways they've done that? By partnering with Coborn's on [NuVal scores](#) to make it easier to make healthier food choices and [BLEND](#) and its mission to reduce obesity in children.

In 2014, CentraCare announced a 28 percent decrease in the rate of overweight or obese 12-year-old boys from six years before. (Read more about [that data](#) at [sctimes.com](#).)

St. Cloud State University has also been making moves to improve the well-being of students, staff and faculty, said Earl H. Potter III, the university's president.

Students come to the school with an increasing array of needs, from homelessness and hunger, to mental health conditions and learning disabilities. Its employees have been stretched through budget cuts.

Dr. Michael Greger delivered the keynote address. A physician, best-selling author, speaker and founder of [nutritionfacts.org](#), he highlighted how plant-based diets can prevent, control and reverse many diseases that lead the nation's causes of death, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Follow Stephanie Dickrell on Twitter @SctimesSteph, call her at 255-8749 or find more stories at [www.sctimes.com/sdickrell](#).

## More online

Read a replay of the St. Cloud Times live blog from the morning programming of the Greater St. Cloud Workplace Well-Being summit at [www.sctimes.com/conversations](#).

## Health company leader provides insight on workplace wellness

Gallup-Healthways provided results from the Well-Being 5 survey, which asked local employees how they felt about various aspects of wellness.

Dana Williams, one of the co-founders of [Healthways](#), helped interpret the results and provided insight and context from his own experiences.

"The original mission, and why it was founded 35 years ago, I think we're closer to reaching that potential than we ever were. ... Our mission was begin to help redesign the delivery of health care in this country. And we have concluded ... you can't change the system. You have to change the objective. ... The objective should be improving people's health and well-being. When you do that, the system will naturally have to adapt and adjust."

St. Cloud isn't alone in seeking well-being.

"I think the speed of change right now is faster than I've seen in my 35 years of working," he said.

What we have been doing isn't working, he said.

"We're just shifting dollars, shifting accountability, shifting risk. That's not the core problem," he said. "Get to the root cause. The root cause isn't the medical care delivery system. The root cause is that the people are accessing it too frequently, unnecessarily because their well-being overall is suffering. If you improve their well-being ... you won't need health care services as much."

At his company, they've been making changes to improve well-being as well. The challenge was to maintain the participation and the focus on it over a five-year period. To do so, they redesigned benefit plans, they involved the spouses and families so they had reinforcement at home.

CentraCare's fitness challenges between departments is one way to drive employee involvement. (Read more about [those programs](#) at [sctimes.com](#).)

"You make them fun, you play up on the human dynamic of being competitive, all with the intent of well-being and having fun," Williams said. "Make this adventure fun, because there's enough in the world that's not fun."

Businesses have to create a positive company culture. That will outlast any change in leadership, he said.

"What I hear form the business community is they have difficulty getting employees to engage and participate. Well, I happen to believe the bigger problem is the messaging of what you're trying to achieve. They're suspicious of what the employer is up to," he said.

They think the company is only doing it to benefit themselves, or that it's just another in a long line of initiatives that will eventually go away, replaced by another.

It requires a multi-year commitment, he says.

"To me, what well-being is, is where medical science and marketing science meet and come together. Marketing is about messaging, medicine is about science," he said.

