

## Lower Mainland – Pacific National Exhibition

### Boot Camp Gets PNE Employees Active at Work

October 2008



A series of boot camp fitness classes got Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) staff and managers stepping, jumping, running and stretching their way to a healthier workday.

The PNE funded the instructor-led employee boot camps earlier this year with a \$5,000 Active Communities grant from the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA). The classes were so popular, employees kept them going by paying for another round themselves.

The PNE's Human Resources department registered the company as an Active Community through BCRPA in 2007. The intent was to advance the work of the PNE's

existing health and wellness committee of employees and managers. The committee had been looking at new employee programs, as well as possible funding opportunities, when it discovered the provincial Active Communities Initiative.

*"We had a very limited budget last year but we wanted to still make sure that we continued to offer these kinds of programs to our staff,"* said Christine Nontell, PNE Human Resources Generalist, who leads the Exhibition's Active Community initiative. *"The grant fully funded the boot camp sessions that we did. It was quite successful. We had a really good turnout."*

This most recent wellness initiative was built knowing that employees and upper management were interested. The health and wellness committee formed a few years ago after the Human Resources department made a successful proposal to the PNE's Executive Management. Working with the Occupational Health and Safety team, HR had surveyed staff then built the case for a wellness committee and its initiatives.

*"It was brought to our Executive Management and they were open to it right from the start,"* Nontell said.

With approximately 35 participants coming to each workout, the boot camps had the highest participation rates of any of the committee's previous initiatives. The grant funded two sessions. Each lasted one month, with twice-weekly classes. There was a two-week break between the two sessions. Employees funded the third session themselves.

The boot camp program targeted the year-round employees: 150 full-time and 60 management positions—and even brought out some of the 800 part-time employees.

The series of 45-minute classes incorporated circuit training, weight training, yoga, Pilates, ball sculpting, spinning, obstacle training, running, power walking and improved stretching and flexibility techniques. Nontell credits the classes' success to the variety of activities, and to the Cardio Core Boot Camp instructor tailoring the activities to individuals' fitness levels.

*"People who weren't quite as fit and couldn't run as much as everyone else, she would tell them to speed walk,"*

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Nontell observed. *“One of our part-time employees was quite nervous about joining at first, as she did little physical activity. She came out and during the first few sessions, she couldn’t keep up with the running, but kept coming and did the options the trainer gave her.”*

*“She returned for the second session and the third session and we all noticed such a difference in her physical ability. This story is just one of a handful of employees that lacked regular physical activity in their lives until we offered the boot camp sessions onsite.”* To measure their individual progress, the instructor did a cardiovascular assessment and strength assessment on the first and last sessions.

Located in Vancouver near the boundaries of Burnaby and North Vancouver, many of the PNE’s employees commute from their homes in neighbouring cities. Nontell noted common barriers to getting active include work schedules and family commitments. By tacking the classes on to the end of the work day, employees could access the free onsite boot camp by going directly from the office. Nontell noted that some employees were more likely to participate, given the supportive atmosphere and accessibility.

The classes were held outdoors, making use of the PNE’s pathways, steps and benches. On rainy days when the Pacific Coliseum or other onsite facilities weren’t booked, they could head indoors to keep the group’s momentum going.

Since its inception, the health and wellness committee has offered employees

Sun Run training, lunch and learn sessions with speakers, a smoking cessation program, Weight Watchers, a Healthy Hearts Health & Wellness Fair, a Stick & Puck lunchtime drop-in hockey program, and skating sessions. The onsite fitness centre has also introduced 30-minute lunchtime yoga and Pilates classes. Employees find out about the programs and the benefits of active living and healthy eating through the wellness committee’s internal newsletter, memos and mail-outs.

The committee also put together a wellness plan. Its goal was to create a workplace environment encouraging employees to incorporate physical activity, proper nutrition and exercise into their daily routine. The plan contains statistics that make the case for employers investing in wellness programs. Benefits mentioned include reducing workplace accidents, non work-related injuries and diseases, and absenteeism, in addition to increasing employee health, productivity, job satisfaction and employee retention. The plan continues to evolve as the committee evaluates current programs and introduces new initiatives.

*“We are continuing to focus on what’s successful and what’s not, and what the needs of our employees are,”* Nontell said.

She expects the fitness classes to continue in the new year, or to see the return of a staff sports team. With the renewed energy among employees and the investment and support of upper management, the PNE should see many more years of wellness initiatives that increase activity levels year-round.

*“The grant fully funded the boot camp sessions that we did. It was quite successful. We had a really good turnout.”*

- Christine Nontell

## Pacific National Exhibition Highlights

- Health and Wellness Committee comprised of employees and managers promotes healthy, active lifestyle choices for PNE employees
- Committee developed an employee wellness plan
- On-site fitness centre holds lunchtime yoga and Pilates classes
- Offered employees Sun Run training, lunch and learn sessions with speakers, smoking cessation program, Weight Watchers, Healthy Hearts Health & Wellness Fair, Stick & Puck, skating sessions
- Registered as an Active Community through BCRPA in 2007
- Received a \$5,000 Active Communities grant from BCRPA for employee boot camp
- Boot camp included circuit training, weight training, yoga, Pilates, ball sculpting, spinning, obstacle training, running, power walking and improved stretching and flexibility techniques
- Employees voluntarily funding the continuation of fitness sessions

## Pacific National Exhibition Info

- Located in northeast Vancouver near Burnaby boundary
- Hosts shows, exhibits, sporting events, concerts, cultural activities, Playland and the annual summer Fair
- Officially opened in 1910, the Fair is the longest running and best attended annual ticketed event in BC
- Onsite facilities include the Pacific Coliseum, the Agrodome, the Forum, the Garden Auditorium and Rollerland
- Governed by a Board of Directors and Executive Management
- During peak periods, the PNE employs over 3,800 employees
- 1,700 Fair-time, 1,100 Playland, 800 part-time, 120 full-time and 60 management employees
- Largest employer of youth in British Columbia

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