

# what's working

## hamburgers, hot dogs and health screenings

by | **Don Procter**

It's the union's summer picnic. Carnival rides and inflatables, hamburgers and hot dogs, a chance to relax and socialize with co-workers and—check your blood pressure?

Yes, if you attend the summer picnic for members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Local 27. The Toronto union began offering health screenings at the picnic about four years ago, and officials say it has become a popular feature at the annual event.

Local 27 has about 7,000 active members and 1,000 retirees. The picnic, held on the grounds of the union's office and training facility and an adjacent banquet hall, typically draws 3,000 to 4,000 people including members and their families.

The trustees of Local 27's health and welfare plan had heard about the concept of health and wellness at conferences and how preventive measures can help benefit plans control costs, said Mike Yorke, Local 27 president. They wanted to pass that message along to members, and the union decided to work with its third-party benefits plan administrator Manion Wilkins & Associates Ltd. to incorporate a wellness fair into the picnic.

"It was the fastest, most efficient way to reach out to the maximum number of members with a positive message and also one that reached out to their families," Yorke said. "The response has been great, with members coming back year after year to the booth to check against last year's results."

Manion arranged for Homewood Health to conduct the health screenings at the picnic. "They set up kiosks to measure a number of health issues," said Mike Neheli, Manion Wilkins president. "Blood pressure stations and other tests to look at weight, body mass index and percent body fat have been done."

"It's been extremely well-received by members and their extended families," Neheli said, adding that attendees also can meet with Manion representatives at the picnic to ask benefits-related questions.

Attendees record their personal results on a passport for future reference. "Over the years we have had numerous participants bring these cards back from prior years' picnics to celebrate the positive change they expect to see based on the healthy changes they have implemented," said Darren J. Harris, vice president of sales and account management for Homewood Health in central Canada.



*Mike Yorke*  
President,  
United Brotherhood of Carpenters  
and Joiners Local 27,  
Woodbridge, Ontario



*Mike Neheli*  
President,  
Manion Wilkins  
& Associates Ltd.,  
Toronto, Ontario



*Darren J. Harris*  
Vice President,  
Sales and Account Management,  
Central Canada,  
Homewood Health,  
Toronto, Ontario

# plans & trusts

education | research | information

Reproduced with permission from *Plans & Trusts*, Volume 34, No. 5, September/October 2016, pages 4-5, published by the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans ([www.ifebp.org](http://www.ifebp.org)), Brookfield, Wis. All rights reserved. Statements or opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or positions of the International Foundation, its officers, directors or staff. No further transmission or electronic distribution of this material is permitted.



pdf/816



Mark Russo, a Local 27 organizer, participates in the health screenings offered during the union's summer picnic.

Yorke estimated 150 to 200 people participate in the screenings and said the health fair is busy from start to finish.

At this year's picnic, nurses tested carpenters and their families for total blood cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure and body mass index (BMI). These are not diagnostic tests but rather tests that could catch risk factors, Harris pointed out. "Where results are outside normal healthy ranges, attendees are coached on how to pull them closer to normal," he said.

One member tested at a previous picnic with "extremely high blood pressure" was taken to a hospital immediately, Neheli said. "That member came back the following year and thanked the Homewood group for what they had done."

Blood pressure is an important screen because it is linked to debilitating conditions such as heart attacks and strokes, Harris explained. "Often people aren't aware their blood pressure is abnormal because they aren't experiencing any symptoms." There are practical and medication-free ways to treat it, including diet, exercise and stress management.

Body composition is another important screen. For people who are overweight, diet and exercise are solutions but the outcome is not always weight loss. "Often the goal can be to lose fat and gain lean muscle mass," he said.

Local 27 receives anonymous aggregate statistics to show the risk profile of attendees but hasn't yet made a plan for how to use the information.

The health and wellness fair at the union's annual picnic is a step in the right direction, but it is only a step, Neheli explained. "The challenge, in my opinion, is the creation and management of an ongoing wellness plan going forward."

One possibility would be to look at the health of every new member/apprentice, he suggested. "What better time to identify that there are some potential health risks than when a person first joins the union?"

Both union members and trustees "need to candidly discuss" the subject before the next step is taken, Yorke said, adding that there have been some discussions but no specific plans developed.

The local has made "a conscious commitment to create a balanced work and home lifestyle for their members," Neheli said. "They want individuals to be healthier, smarter, to work harder and live longer. By getting members to recognize the importance of that, it will help the individual (benefit) plan participants to better manage the costs of the benefit programs as well."

*Don Procter is a Toronto-based freelance writer.*



Joseph Iannuzzi, a Local 27 business representative, gets his height checked during a wellness fair at the union's summer picnic.