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R E P R I N T

With soaring energy costs weighing on everyone's minds and pocketbooks this summer, LifeBridge Health gave \$50 gas cards to all of its 6,119 employees.

CEO Warren Green knows the gas cards couldn't solve all the big problems high prices create. But, he said, "We knew people were really struggling with the gas crisis, and this said, 'We know times are tough and we care about that.'"

No one benefit or one policy allows LifeBridge to hire and keep good employees, Green said. That happens as a result of all the small things LifeBridge does to reward employees. Those have added up to a first-place finish among large employers in the *Baltimore Business Journal's* "Best Places to Work" competition three years in a row.

Bev Rosen, president of Motivating Wellness at Work in Lutherville, has researched what employers can do to perk up their work force amid the economic gloom, and found that gas cards are the single most effective move. "You are really doing something that meets their needs," Rosen said.

LifeBridge's most popular employee benefit is the "Elbies" awards (for "LB"). Each employee gets an account in the rewards program, and he or she earns points for doing things that help the company — such as performing an extra service for a patient or helping the company earn a strong accreditation score. Employees can redeem the points at any time; they can use them almost immediately for a new toaster or save them for a big vacation trip.

Strong benefits and perks programs are key for LifeBridge, the fourth-largest health system in Baltimore, comprised of Sinai and Northwest hospitals, a geriatric center and a nursing home. LifeBridge relies heavily on professionals like nurses and radiologists, where there are shortages of qualified people and competition for them is tough.

"The pay scales at all the hospitals in town tend to be similar," Green said. "You have to go beyond that."

Salaries at LifeBridge start below \$10 an hour for service workers and range all the way up to more than \$90 per hour for executives and managers.

Benefits include health and dental, pre-

scription eye care, long-term disability and an employee-assistance program that provides help with counseling and other services. LifeBridge also offers 401(k) and 403(b) retirement plans and domestic partner benefits. The company provides tuition reimbursement and has a department devoted to training and development, supplemented by a Web-based training system.

LifeBridge provides financial help to employees who are adopting a child, and participates in Baltimore's Live Near Your Work program, which offers grants to employees buying a first home near their workplace. The company also offers employee discounts at its Pikesville fitness center. And the cafeteria is a cut above many workplace lunchrooms, with offerings like sushi and locally grown foods.

LifeBridge also is an active participant in several local charities. At a time when the economy is in the doldrums, getting employees together for charitable efforts builds morale inside LifeBridge and hopefully makes a difference in the world outside, Green said.

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Warren Green, CEO of LifeBridge Health, says strong salaries and a variety of perks continue to keep the organization's employees content.

LARGE COMPANY



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LifeBridge Health

Description of company: Regional health care organization

Number of local employees: 6,119

Most popular perk: "Elbies," a rewards program in which employees earn points for doing something that benefits patients and the company.

Out-of-the-box idea: The organization handed out \$50 gas cards to employees as gas prices were mounting this summer.

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