

Boss offers cruise to workers who trim down

By Karen Smith
Staff Writer

Patrick Patterson was eating a lot of fast food and not exercising properly while traveling for work. He felt sluggish, especially at the end of each business day. Then his employer made him an offer he couldn't refuse: If Patterson, a Rochester Hills resident, would reduce his body fat by 15 percent in four months, his boss would treat him to a three-day cruise.

Now the 26-year-old retirement consultant is eating Subway sandwiches instead of McDonald's hamburgers and working out five days a week instead of two or three. "The trip is a very strong motivator," said Patterson, who has until Jan. 31 to get his body fat down to 11.5 percent.

Already, Patterson feels better. "I have more energy and a better attitude at the tail end of the day — instead of the last hour dragging on." Patterson is one of 35 employees at Freedom One Financial Group in Clarkston who signed up for President/CEO Mark Wayne's latest Fitness Challenge on Oct. 31. They can choose to reduce their body fat by 15 percent, reduce their weight by 15 percent or lose 25 pounds to get the free trip. Spouses' expenses, except for airfare, are paid, too. To help his employees, Wayne gives them free use of the company's on-site workout gym and pays for a personal trainer to staff the gym three days a week. Even their spouses are allowed to use the facility. Wayne started offering Fitness Challenges this year to help his employees be their best physically. The company, which has 72 employees, is the state's largest full-service 401K provider. "They work better, they're more positive, they have clearer minds," the Clarkston resident said. "Except for a bunch of computers and pretty desks, what we offer is our intelligence capital ... we don't make widgets ... our team members have to be on their tip-top toes." The better and stronger his employees are, the better and stronger his company is, he said. The first Fitness Challenge resulted in 15 employees losing more than 200 pounds; the second in 35 employees logging a combined 8,800 miles of fitness activities. Prizes in those contests included a paid day off, \$25 gift cards and a chance to win a drawing for a weekend getaway to Frankenmuth. John Young, the company's executive vice president of sales and marketing, said the first two contests were more competitive in nature with employees vying in teams for added prizes. The third challenge, with its guaranteed prize of a cruise to all who meet their chosen goal, is designed to instill lifestyle changes. Young, of West Bloomfield, knows the benefits of such changes. A former GM employee for 23 years, he used to work 12- and 14-hour days without eating breakfast or lunch or exercising. His weight ballooned to 256 pounds. Since February 2004, after Freedom One moved from Troy into its new offices with the workout gym on M-15, he has lost 50 pounds. He works out five days a week at the gym with Wayne and another co-worker, then goes to breakfast. "I'm seeing a huge difference," he said, adding he has more energy. As more and more employees get in shape — a few are so fit they don't have 15 percent extra body fat to lose — Wayne is considering another challenge rewarding participants for maintaining their healthy weights. Wayne's company may be too small to realize any savings in health care premiums, he said, but he's going after the "soft dollars" that can be saved when employees feel their best. Receptionist Carol Powers, 36, of Holly appreciates Wayne's emphasis on fitness. The wife and mother of one has been trying to lose the belly fat so many women her age struggle with. "That's the only way I could do this, the only way," she said of working out in the company gym on her lunch hours. "There's no time with work and then family. "I feel so lucky. I've never ever had an opportunity like this."

ksmith@hometownlife.com | (248) 651-7575, ext. 14



John Stormzand | Staff Photographer

Working out

Rochester Hills resident Patrick Patterson, 26, a retirement consultant for Freedom One Financial Group in Clarkston, works out in the company's gym. If he reduces his body fat by 15 percent by Jan. 31, his boss will treat him to a three-day cruise.

