



Lose weight, gain money

Company teams can compete

By SUE STOCK
STAFF WRITER

As millions of Americans struggle to lose weight, one company is bringing its monetary solution straight to companies in the Tar Heel state.

Healthy Wage is a website business that collects money from sponsors and then pays people to battle the bulge.

The New York company, founded a year and a half ago, has largely been getting notice for its BMI challenge, in which individuals win \$100 if they can reduce their body mass index from 30 to 25.

For those who need extra incentive, they can "bet" \$300 of their own money, which will turn into \$1,000 if they meet the challenge.

Now Healthy Wage is moving to group competitions. In the first team competition last year, a team from Raleigh won the grand prize.

As 2011 starts, Healthy Wage is preparing to launch a team weight loss challenge in 22 areas, including one in North Carolina.

Teams of five from area companies will compete, with prizes of \$10,000, \$5,000 and \$3,000 for the three teams

that lose the highest percentage of their weight.

People participating in the program will pay \$60, or \$50 if their company is willing to pay \$2 per participating employee. Companies that do so will be eligible for a \$25,000 prize if they host the winning team.

"After the success of the team competition, we decided to expand into the corporate wellness arena," said co-founder David Roddenberry. "A lot of companies do a lot of internal weight loss programs, but this is taking it to the next level and making it more exciting."

Roddenberry declined to name any of the companies who pay into the Healthy Wage website but said that the average weight loss per person is about 5 percent.

Companies can have more than one team, and people can sign up family members and friends, not just co-workers. Registration will open March 15, and the contest will run April 16 through July 15.

Participants will be required to weigh in at a doctor's office or gym partner location to verify their results throughout the contest.

Motivating people with money will encourage participation, said Dan Ariely, a behavioral economist in Duke University's Fuqua School of Business.

SEE **WEIGHT**, PAGE 3E

"I think the basic reality is that we are not designed to care about the future," he said. "We're living much longer than we were in history, and we're just not designed to care what will happen 30 years from now. So every time you encounter a trade-off between the short term and the long term, there's a good chance that the short term will win."

Adding a monetary incen-

tive, Ariely said, gives people a short-term reason to care about their long-term health.

"What financial incentives do is they basically change the equation," he said. "All of the sudden, you care because of something that will happen right now."

Still, Ariely cautioned, simply providing a monetary incentive for a short-term goal does not mean that people will change their long-term behaviors.

"The thought that everything would be OK if you just diet for a year is too naive on one hand," he said. "But on the other hand, if it's done correctly, the residue of what you have changed could stay with you for a while."

sue.stock@newsobserver.com
or 919-829-4649

