

## Serving Spirit

### Add corporate chaplains to your benefit lineup

By Georgia Beaverson

The ever-expanding lineup of employee benefits has a new — and relatively inexpensive — addition. Like hospitals and the Armed Services, many U.S. companies are contracting with corporate chaplains. And now Dane County businesses can, too.

#### Somewhere to turn

In a December *New York Times* article, reporter Neela Banerjee revealed that Fortune 100 employer Tyson Foods started its own program in 1999. Tyson employs 127 chaplains at about 250 of the company's 300 North American plants.

Other employers turn to chaplaincy groups, such as Marketplace Chaplains USA, created 22 years ago. Founder Gil Stricklin told Banerjee that then, the nonprofit signed up one business every four months and Fortune 500 companies never returned his calls. Today, he contracts with new businesses every three days, and is negotiating with a company that employs 175,000 people.

What gives?

According to Steve Cook, owner of Madison's for-profit Capital Chaplains, LLC, there are plenty of reasons for this trend. In Stephen Covey's book, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*, the author urges business managers not to ignore serving a person's spirit, as that is what his/her body, mind and heart revolve around.

"It's an acknowledgement that people are holistic," explains Cook.

In addition, marketplace trends have led straight to this tack. In the 1960s, the trend was toward ethnic inclusion. In the 1970s, gender inclusion made forward strides. The 1980s and 1990s trended to include different lifestyles. Since 2000, the trend has cycled to employee wellness and faith-friendliness.

For many people, the connections that once provided support in their world have been severed. Neighbors often don't know one another. Many people, even believers, don't attend church regularly. Family might be far away. When an emergency strikes, many employees have nowhere to turn. And that's where chaplains step in.

#### Corporate chaplains care

"Our management team was searching for an Em-



Steve Cook (left) of Capital Chaplains, LLC, talks with a Pellitteri Waste Systems employee.

Photo by Amy Lynn Schreck

ployee Assistance Program (EAP), but also wanted a service that was more personal and offered, if the employee wanted, to pursue spiritual matters," explains Robert Dehnert, human resources manager for Pellitteri Waste Systems, one of Cook's clients. "With Capital Chaplains, a familiar person is available to our employees with needs for crisis intervention, referral services for specialized needs, pastoral visits and services, special services, etc. Capital Chaplains offers so much more than a typical EAP, where an employee calls a 1-800 number and talks to a different person each time they call ... Employees use this service regularly."

It's the human touch that works. Cook, once an administrative pastor at High Point Church in Madison, bases his chaplaincy on four fundamentals: relationships, permission, confidentiality and availability. To that end, he comes to the job site during certain hours every week. He is a resource for those in crisis or those who need to talk to someone.

"When an emergency comes up, the relationship is there," says Cook.

He goes to Pellitteri's every Tuesday from 5:15-9 a.m. Because he's on-site, he's available and employees can consult with him. Often, he says, employers allow him to meet with an employee with a problem on company time.

Cook has talked to employees about divorces, visited them in the hospital, and come alongside them during a family death. Recently, one employee faced foreclosure while dealing with a child with special needs. Cook intervened with this person's mortgage company, which instantly grew more flexible once a pastor got involved. "They were more than willing to be generous," he reports.

#### Benefits accrue

The Engelhart Center recently signed on with Capital Chaplains, due in large part to the referral they got from Pellitteri's.

"They have been offering this benefit and have seen good results from it," explains general manager Robert Hintz. "Employee morale can affect his or her

performance and the employee will not always have someone to talk to ... I want my employees to know that I care for them and understand that if they are having a problem, I want to help."

Hintz says the service is a good buy, too. "His fees are on a sliding scale, based on how many employees you have. I can say I thought it was affordable in comparison to other benefits we offer."

"Capital Chaplains offers support to our employees that is unique and useful," adds Dehnert. "It is a unique, free benefit to our employees that separates us from our competitors. ... We hope our employees find a level of security, stability and a supportive work environment..."

"In short, happy employees!" ■

### The religious issue...

While some national corporate chaplaincy groups have a goal of evangelizing employees, Steve Cook took great care to make sure he didn't trespass on employees' private beliefs when he formed Capital Chaplains.

"I've tried to come up with something unique to this area," he explains, acknowledging Madison's pluralistic, secular culture. His mission statement is service-based, with no religious language or jargon to interfere with the help he offers.

"Clearly, I am a person of faith," he continues. "But I won't initiate faith into the conversation unless the employee brings it up... And our discussions are absolutely confidential."

For more information on Capital Chaplains, visit [www.capchaps.org](http://www.capchaps.org) or call 608-217-7261.