



### **Meaghan and Garth Jansen** **Co-owners, Employers' Edge Inc.**

By Otte Rosenkrantz

WELL, HERE'S A BIT OF TROUBLING NEWS. According to a recent Health Canada research project examining the link between work-life stress and the demands on our health care system, one in five workers rate their health as fair to poor. The study also documented how drug costs have grown at an average annual rate of over 11% between 1999 and 2004, with both prescription and non-prescription medications costing over \$15.5 billion a year and rising.

What's more, figures from Statistics Canada show employee absenteeism increasing from to 8.5 days per year for the average Canadian employee—up from 7.4 days a

decade ago. Based on those figures, it's estimated Canadian businesses lose over 85 million workdays a year at a cost of about \$11.3 billion.

Ouch.

Meaghan and Garth Jansen are founders and co-owners of Employers' Edge Inc., a company dedicated to bettering those statistics. Launched in 2002 and based on research Meaghan was doing on her PhD thesis in kinesiology, Employers' Edge is a consulting firm positioned to help employers invest in the health and well-being of their employees through programs that assist workers to be-

come physically and mentally healthier.

"By helping people develop healthier lifestyles, we can also help improve morale and productivity around the office and lower the amount of time an employee is away due to poor health," says Meaghan.

The notion to launch a wellness consultancy came to Meaghan after she moved to London from New Brunswick to work on her doctorate at Western. "I had a client at a local gym, where I worked as a personal trainer, who was with the Harrison Pensa law firm," she recalls. "I was looking for a company to study—somewhere I could track sick time, insurance claims and costs to collect some statistics. The client suggested I use the law firm."

It was at about this time she met her future husband Garth, and after they saw positive results from their work at Harrison Pensa, they decided to launch similar wellness programs with other law firms, including Lerner LLP. "It was clear that the wellness idea made sense to employers and created a very positive buzz with the employees as people understood and responded to our programs," says Meaghan. "After about a year and a half, we were seeing a real opportunity for us to develop this concept into a consultancy."

As Garth points out, there wasn't anyone delivering this type of comprehensive corporate wellness program in the area and it was clear there was a real need for it in London—and not just with law firms. "Initially we thought we would just be delivering health and nutrition programs, but it quickly became clear that our clients were seeing our programs as perks for the employees, which improved retention and attraction. After Lerner, we signed up with McKay-Cocker Construction in January of 2006, and we also started working with the Children's Aid Society at their three London locations."

To help manage its growing client

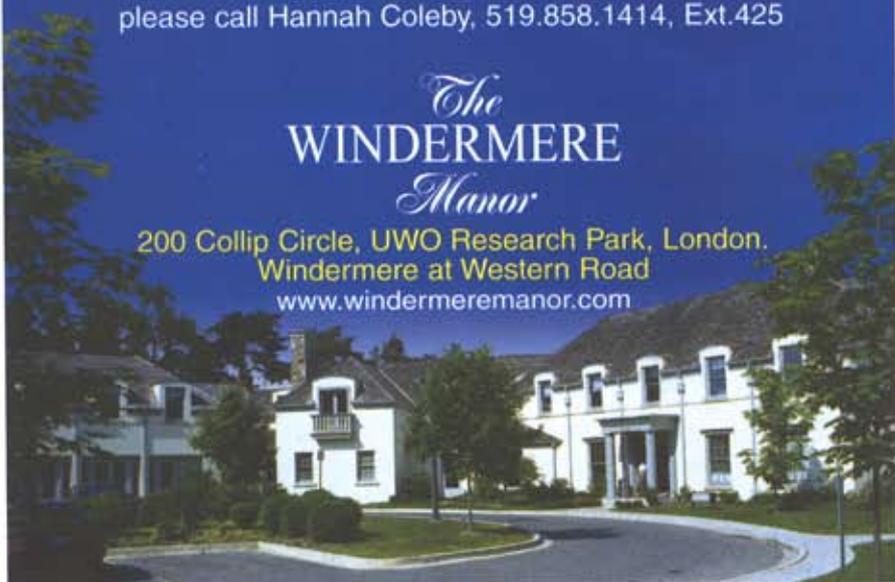
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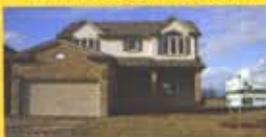
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## FOR THE RECORD / Meaghan and Garth Jansen

**Latest book:** Meaghan is re-reading *The Power of Focus* by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hanson and Les Hewitt. "It's a great book for goal setting and focusing on tasks." Garth has just read Sam Walton's *Made in America*, the story of how Walton made Wal-Mart such a success.

**Hobbies:** We play a lot of soccer, we love skiing and we weight train as well.

**Recent travel:** Our parents live in New Brunswick, so we go there a couple of times a year. Last February we went to Killington in Vermont for skiing.

**Working advice:** Get an experienced business coach. It's extremely helpful to have someone give a third, objective opinion about what you are planning and how things are going. The person we use has a lot of life experience and was a corporate trainer for 20 years. The other thing is keeping to-do lists all the time—and make sure they get done. We also get a lot of ideas and inspiration from belonging to professional associations.

base, which now totals some 1,100 employees, Employers' Edge has taken on four wellness consultants of its own. "There's a lot of work to be done in this area," says Meaghan. "We take a preventative, proactive approach to wellness, working with the employees in all aspects of their lifestyles."

There are no quick solutions, of course, but often benefits can be seen almost immediately in the areas of stress reduction and improved eating and exercising patterns.

"There are three components to our program," Meaghan explains. "We start with the analytical component, where we do the needs assessment, which gives us a sense of the corporate culture as a whole. And then we design the program"

This leads to the second component, which is a hands-on program of exercise and nutrition through a variety of healthy eating initiatives. "We may, for instance, have certain days of the week when the cafeteria serves only healthy food choices."

The third component is education with lunch-and-learn sessions where various guest speakers will talk about related health and wellness issues. "Every organization is different, and we customize our programs to suit the needs of the company. We try to focus our efforts on targeting people's behaviours."



But as Garth notes, all of the programs are voluntary for employees. "None of the companies want to force employees to take part, but once people see the benefits others are experiencing they usually want to be part of it. Positive results are very infectious and encouraging."

Not surprisingly, both Meaghan and Garth are dedicated followers of their own health and fitness program. "Garth is training for a triathlon in the spring and I'm going to be in a half marathon, so we are doing a lot of fitness training," says Meaghan. "But we also get in half an hour or so of personal development time, usually in the form of reading. We also listen to various informational and motivational tapes in the car on the way to meet clients. We believe we should walk the talk." ■