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Motorola boosts benefits to compete for workers

BY JAMES A. AHLERS
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Motorola unleashes a campaign today to combat the tight labor market by pampering its employees.

The Semiconductor Products Sector is introducing an upgraded benefits program to provide 20,000 employees in the Valley and in Austin, Texas, with concierge services, child care and on-site exercise facilities. With the new program, "etc.," Motorola hopes to create a work

environment for the next century.

"The corporate culture has to change because our demographic is changing," said Sandi Aitken, program manager. "When we come to work every day, we're more than employees, we're human beings."

Employees who don't feel treated like human beings can walk, with little fear of long-term unemployment. The U.S. unemployment rate was 4.4 percent in February, and Arizona's was

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BOOSTS: Benefits key to recruiting

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slightly lower. This means a shortage of skilled labor nationwide, a shortage analysts say is especially acute in the information technology industry.

In this tough market, benefits are key to recruiting, said Ken McDonnell, an analyst at the non-profit Employee Benefit Research Institute in Washington, D.C. People are more likely to work for a company that provides certain benefits, he said, even if they never use them. "Because they think, 'The company cares about me.' Small gestures that affect their pocketbooks mean something to the rank and file," he said.

Such "gestures" are increasingly common in large companies. Broad-based "wellness" programs, for example, not only help attract and retain employees, but also reduce medical costs, McDonnell said.

Motorola's wellness program "Lifeforce" has been around since 1991, providing employees with medical screenings and personal counseling. The program also offers reimbursements for employees who play golf or take classes to quit smoking, among other things.

The renamed "etc." program retains these services and adds others.

The concierge service, beginning in July, will allow employees to have someone else do their laundry, change their oil, care for their pets or pick their kids up from school, at \$5 an hour. Motorola negotiated this discounted rate with personal services company 2 Places at 1 Time.

The Semiconductor Products Sector will open its first child development center in Early 2000 near its Tempe factory, at Elliot Road and River Parkway in the Arizona State University

Research Park. The facility, managed by Bright Horizons Family Solutions, will offer discounts and scholarships to Motorola employees.

The company currently has gymnasiums in Mesa, Tempe and Phoenix, to which it will add more weightlifting and exercise machines, as well as massage and physical therapy services. Motorola has contracted Club One Professional Services to manage the gyms.

Susie Sanchez, an employee of Motorola for 21 years, dons a red leotard for step aerobics at the gym in the Mesa plant, moving to the beat of instructor and Phoenix Suns dancer Charla Pickett. Sanchez is thankful for the on-site classes, she said, because, "If it's a stressful day and you are worn out, a lot of times you don't make it to the gym."

She said the new benefits could be a great help, especially the concierge service. "Time is essence now. Sometimes it's more worth it to save time than money," she said.

Ken Lynch, 59, who also participates in step aerobics classes, is the machine shop supervisor at the Mesa plant and has worked for Motorola for 25 years. He said the new benefits program is typical of his experience with the company. "I think Motorola has always been concerned about its employees," he said. "If you wanted something, it's always been here."

Motorola's broad benefits have their limits, of course. Aitken said one employee requested reimbursement for an uncommon personal wellness activity. "I had to tell him we don't reimburse for calf-roping," she said.



ANDY SAWYER/TRIBUNE

Active employees: Motorola employees work out in an aerobics class in the fitness center of the Semiconductor Products Sector plant at Dobson and Broadway roads in Mesa. The company plans to expand the training and wellness facilities in all its Valley semiconductor plants.