

# CASE STUDY



## GREENING UH: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS

### Sustainability Certification Program and Green Health Heroes

University Hospitals Health System (UH) has structured its sustainability program on four pillars of wellness: building well, operating well, buying well, and living well. The system has taken multiple approaches to engage employees in its sustainability efforts, including general communication strategies, a system wide sustainability council and facility-based committees, a Green Health Hero awards program, and the latest project—a sustainability certification program for managers.

*UH utilizes a multitude of communication strategies for engaging employees around sustainability.*

A “Greening UH” brand is included on all sustainability-related communications so that employees know to contact the UH Office of Sustainability for questions or ways to get involved in a particular effort. Employees primarily contact a general “Greening UH” email address for inquiries about anything related to sustainability programs in the system.

The Greening UH team also syncs its annual event and communications calendar with national and regional initiatives to engage employees in broader sustainability efforts outside of the walls of UH. Here are a few examples:

- Energy Awareness Month included a “Flip the Switch” campaign and the Employee Energy Challenge; “Use Less, Recycle the Rest” during Recycling Month; and food day incorporated an “Eat Real Food” photo contest.

### University Hospitals Health System

University Hospitals, the second largest employer in Northeast Ohio with 25,000 employees, serves the needs of patients through an integrated network of 15 hospitals, 29 outpatient health centers and primary care physician offices in 15 counties. At the core of this \$3.5 billion health system is University Hospitals Case Medical Center, ranked among America’s 50 best hospitals by U.S. News & World Report in all 12 methodology ranked specialties. Its main campus includes UH Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital, ranked among the top children’s hospitals in the nation; UH MacDonald Women’s Hospital, Ohio’s only hospital for women; and UH Seidman Cancer Center, part of the NCI designated Case Comprehensive Cancer Center at Case Western Reserve University



- Earth Day celebrations have included a recyclable materials fashion show, sculpture contests, giveaways of bikes, reusable coffee mugs, tree plantings, and zero waste giveaways such as basil plants in biodegradable containers.
- As 2015 is the Year of Clean Water for the Sustainable Cleveland 2019 Initiative, UH linked local art with painted rain barrels to heighten awareness about storm water management; a reusable water bottle pledge earned employees UH health premium discounts (HealthMiles).
- Bike to Work Day programming and a five-month biking challenge awards HealthMiles and relates back to the overall UH transportation sustainability strategy.

On the Greening UH webpage, there is a [sustainability pledge](#) (commitment to implementing changes at work and home) that employees can fill out which allocates UH Appreciation points and HealthMiles. Each question has a “learn more” button to provide education as well as incentives to improve individual behaviors.

Finally, more general communication strategies include:

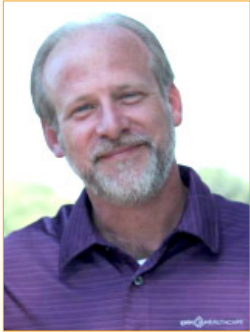
- Combining sustainability with wellness – the message of sustainability efforts as positive contributors to public health has really resonated.
- Communication is ALWAYS a positive message and focuses on celebrating wins rather than avoiding losses. This happens at each meeting, but the Office of Sustainability also hosts a celebration at the end of the year to recognize the impacts for patients, employees and the community.
- A [Greening UH video series](#) helps to illustrate the positive impacts of sustainability efforts throughout UH and the community
- An [annual report](#) is sent out to employees and community leaders.
- Every single presentation reviews the four pillars of wellness (living well, buying well, operating well, and building well).

### **Sustainability Council and Committees**

A first step of the UH Office of Sustainability was to develop a coordinated structure for effective communication, goal-setting, and sustainability-related project implementation throughout the system. Leveraging the HHI Engaged Leadership Challenge, the Office of Sustainability engaged the director of operations for each hospital across the system and collaborated with the CEO and all hospital presidents to ultimately develop and sign off on an environmental statement of commitment for University Hospitals. The system-wide council is comprised of selected stakeholders from facilities, IT, clinical services, the operations directors from each facility, marketing and communications, nutrition services, environmental services, human resources, and other key decisions makers.

Facility-based sustainability committees are typically chaired by the operations directors at each respective hospital, meeting on a monthly basis, and in some cases facilities have chosen to incorporate sustainability

## Meet a Green Health Hero



### **Dave Willets**

*UH Elyria Medical Center  
Director, Materials  
Management*

Dave Willets, director of materials management at UH Elyria Medical Center, was nominated as a Green Health Hero thanks to his work on the hospital's single-use device (SUD) reprocessing program.

[His full profile can be read on the UH website.](#)

programming into existing meetings such as Environment of Care meetings. Each committee addresses progress toward the HHI Challenge goals and incorporates data tracking and reporting into its meetings. Leadership support was key in driving this initial momentum and support.

### **Green Health Heroes**

This program was developed as a way to recognize the efforts of individual employees. As described on UH's website, "Green Health Heroes are peer-nominated employees of UH who champion sustainability above and beyond the call of duty. They take leadership roles in helping UH to advance environmental responsibility, promote health and wellness, and save costs to the health system." When a person is recognized as a Green Health Hero by a peer, he or she is interviewed and profiled on the external Greening UH Web page, credited \$50 worth of UH Appreciates points, and acknowledged in front of colleagues and UH senior leadership at the annual employee sustainability celebration. Any UH employee can nominate a Green Health Hero at any time, and nominations are reviewed by select sustainability council members for final selection and profiling. Final selection is determined by the quality and significance of the nominees' work, as well as the educational value of featuring their work in a public profile to be reviewed by colleagues and community members.

### **Sustainability Certification Program**

UH completed a Sustainability Certification Program pilot for approximately 35

managers at UH Geauga Medical Center. These managers were required to attend a day-long training and participate in a group sustainability project. UH collaborated with Case Western Reserve University to customize their "Sustainability Certificate" track for this pilot training program. The program included:

- Lecture series on corporate sustainability followed by project-based learning.
- Development of projects that reflect each hospital's strategic priorities and have measurable sustainability impacts.
- Pilot project topics such as wellness workplace design, community outreach, employee wellness programs, paper use reduction strategies and a chemotherapy waste reduction project.
- Convening of project groups three months after the kick-off meeting to present their project presentations and results to a leadership panel.

The top project chosen by leadership was a chemotherapy dose rounding protocol with an annualized projected impact of \$163,000. This protocol is currently being implemented system-wide.

The goal of the Sustainability Certification Program is to both further progress on environmental innovation and to engage departmental managers in the process. The certification is a development opportunity for key staff and empowers them to improve processes and environmental impact.

## Challenges

### Green Health Heroes

- This engages only the nominated peer-perceived champions of sustainability. It doesn't have an avenue for any employee to engage with sustainability.

### Sustainability Certification Program Pilot

- Need commitment from senior leadership.
- Logistics can be difficult. Finding suitable dates and meeting locations can delay execution.
- Clinicians need to be able to make the link between sustainability to patient care and community health.

### Other challenges

- Regular and ongoing education is necessary, even for recycling.
- Reaching the masses is difficult with 25,000+ employees, particularly at smaller health centers.
- Encouraging employees to bring home sustainability habits/behaviors to work. Employees sometimes feel frustrated with the pace—how do you keep them interested and not disappointed? (*For example, with the bike challenge—no showers or bike lockers for some locations.*)
- Employees feel like small fish in a big sea. The challenge is to identify the tools employees need to feel empowered and get involved.

## What Does Success Look Like?

Affecting positive change within a large and diverse health system requires constant contact with employees at all levels of the organization. Communications efforts necessitate a delicate balance of emphasis on triple bottom line priorities of social, economic, and environmental responsibility. This was understood with the establishment of the Office of Sustainability in 2010, which is why education and outreach was identified as one of the five key priority areas right from the start. The teams collaborate closely with the marketing and communications department to reach employees and community members through a variety of media.

## What's Next

1. Creating a version of Beaumont Health System's Green Officer program to help employees feel empowered. This would be a voluntary program, and employees would be identified on the name badge.
2. Expansion of the sustainability certification training program to a second hospital, with the overall goal to repeat the program throughout the entire system.
3. Engaging patients with sustainability and health messages:
  - Putting together a pamphlet with messages from "your green doctor"—ways to be healthy and environmentally conscious.

Communications efforts necessitate a delicate balance of emphasis on triple bottom line priorities of social, economic, and environmental responsibility.

- Using patient TV monitors to illustrate the Greening UH program through short videos.
  - Healthy harvest food program - expanding educational information on healthy and sustainable eating choices based on patient/participant feedback.
4. Incorporating sustainability information into system human resources employee orientation to provide basic educational information to all incoming UH employees.



## Measurable Outcomes

### Communication Strategies

- **Employee Energy Competition** – 456 engaged employees, 2071 energy savings actions pledged, and 1,181 energy actions at work were reported to continue beyond the challenge.
- **Bike Challenge Pilot Program (pilot year)** – 130 active participants avoided seven metric tons of CO2 emissions over five months, which is equivalent to driving 16,601 miles/year or growing 179 tree seedlings for 10 years.
- **“Mount Ruhlman” Stair Climb Challenge** - 208 employees, 11 flights of stairs.
- Evaluation of page hits on intranet and extranet help to understand what people are interested in and when.
- [Greening UH videos](#) are the most popular in comparison to all UH videos shared on employee intranet.

### Sustainability Certification Program

- Thirty-five managers completed the training.
- Survey results indicated that most participants rated sustainability as “very applicable” to their work after completing the training.
- Expected savings from project chosen: \$163,000 annually at one hospital.

### Green Health Heroes

- Twenty-one Green Health Heroes have been nominated since 2013.