

Physician's practice recognized

Midwest Occupational Medicine named Small Business of the Month

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WOOD RIVER — Midwest Occupational Medicine, a local physician's practice which specializes in work-related health issues, was recently recognized by the RiverBend Growth Association as its Small Business of the Month.

According to George Dirkers, an internal medicine physician who founded the practice in 1992, the high concentration of heavy industry in the Metro-East creates a significant need for occupation services. Though based in Wood River, the practice has now added offices in Belleville and Collinsville, and employs three

physicians. Together, they see employees from almost 800 companies every month.

The doctors are in the business of keeping workers on their feet, Dirkers explains.

"We basically treat injured workers for on the job, anything from back sprains to lacerations," he said. "We take things out of people's eyes, we do anything that helps keep workers healthy and safe."

The group also does physicals on newly hired workers, many of whom work in industries where their safety is dependent on being healthy. For example, Dirkers says, many local trucking companies send employees their way to make sure they are fit for the

road.

Occupational medicine offers advantages over other medical practices for business and industry, Dirkers points out. Physicians in the practice are familiar with many problems workers encounter, allowing them to administer treatment much more quickly and efficiently than an emergency room could. Some local hospital even send their staff there when they are injured.

Midwest is recognized for its knowledge of chemicals workers can be exposed to.

"There's a lot of chemical exposures, and we have a very specialized knowledge of chemical exposures," Dirkers said, adding that in

an ER, physicians would have to research the conditions, delaying treatment. "We have working knowledge of that. We probably have a better know of that than a lot of physicians in the area and in the country."

Physicals, drug testing, and other such matters account for about 85 percent of patients who come through the doors, but the doctors do see four to eight on-the-job injuries per day.

"We see pretty serious crush injuries, amputations, broken bones are not uncommon at all," Dirkers said.

Still, he points out, most companies are very safety-conscious today.

"Most companies nowadays

have a very aggressive safety program. They are pretty good around this area for the most part. The desire to keep workers safe is good for business, good for employees and good for the community in general."

While the work is challenging, Dirkers knows he has found the right job.

"I just love the direct patient contact," he said. "I feel very lucky to be able to talk and work with patients directly and be a part of their world and a part of their treatment. It's something that not a lot of people get to do."

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