

Lifetime

A woman with short brown hair, wearing a tan button-down shirt and a black skirt, stands smiling in front of a white backdrop. She is holding a brown teddy bear. To her left, a wooden tricycle with red wheels sits on the white surface. The background shows a building and trees with autumn foliage. The title 'Lifetime' is written in large, olive-green letters across the top.

The butcher, the baker, the auto mechanic? Some companies are bringing Main Street into the office—which makes a working mom's balancing act a lot easier.

BY HEIDI ERNST



ON TOP OF HER NORMAL LIFE DUTIES—earn a paycheck, raise a child—there's a lot of other stuff Raegan Hill needs to get done in an average week. On a recent Monday, the 32-year-old software marketing specialist dropped off a pile of dry cleaning. Tuesday, she got her car washed. Wednesday, picked up the dry cleaning. Thursday, got a manicure, hit the ATM for cash, and bought stamps. Friday? Time for an oil change, a stop at the bank, and a quick game of pickup basketball with her 8-year-old son. Hill also worked out at the gym four times that week—and she did every single one of these things without leaving her workplace.

Hill's employer is BMC Software, and the company's Houston campus has so many amenities it sometimes seems more like a small town than an office park. And BMC isn't alone in offering such perks. In 1999, 52 percent of companies offered some sort of on-site "convenience service"—ranging from massages to grocery shopping—according to a survey of 1,020 employers conducted by Hewitt Associates, the country's largest compensation and bene-

The Caregiver: No more bumper-to-bumper drive from the child-care center to the office. SAS kids go to work with Mom and spend the day with child-care provider Suzanne Yellig.

fits consultant. Five years earlier, the category didn't even exist in the company's polling.

The presence of such services in the workplace is, of course, a descendant of the old "company town" concept—albeit a kinder, gentler version. The original company town was likely to have grown up around a mine or a factory, and the company itself probably owned every stick of real estate in the city limits. Employees shopped, ate, and often even slept on company property, and the business was likely to generate a profit from its workers' pockets. ▶





The Car-Detailing Guy

Won't have time to scrape the gum off the backseat before your mother-in-law's visit? SAS employees can leave the car with auto guru Mark Livesay as they arrive at work.

Today's company towns aren't nearly so omnipotent, and employers say the only profit they're after is to attract and keep good workers. Services that let workers get more done in less time are

particularly appealing in an era of 60-hour workweeks and multihour commutes—and *especially* to time-crunched working mothers.

The promise of such benefits was certainly a motivator for Hill, who wanted to work at BMC so badly that she sought out recruiting agencies that she knew worked with BMC managers. "I was excited to hear about a place that was so family-focused," says Hill. "As a single mom, these perks really help me get everything done that I need to do."

In fact, many working mothers leave their jobs because their employers can't make it possible for them to get other things *besides* work done, says Marcia Brumit Kropf, vice president of research and information services at

Catalyst, a New York nonprofit organization working with businesses to advance women. "They're demanding flexibility so they can be in control of their own calendars," she says.

So what are employees getting?

■ At Netscape, employees can see the dentist, shop at a florist, visit a travel agent, or drop off film for developing, all at the Internet company's Mountain View, California, campus.

■ At the San Antonio financial services company USAA, employees can pick up a loaf of bread or some produce to go with dinner as well as shop for five-and-dime sundries at a company store.

■ At USAA—as well as at SAS in Cary, North Carolina, and Valassis Communications in Livonia, Michigan—employees can see doctors if they're feeling under the weather.

■ And at American Century Investments, an investment management firm in Kansas City, Missouri, some 12,000 individual pieces of employees' laundry get cleaned each month.

For those of us who struggle along without such perks, it's hard to imagine that there could be any downside. But some workplace experts see the proliferation of company-town-style benefits in a less positive light. Does less time spent running errands just mean employees have more time to work late? Could companies be offering these perks instead of providing more substantial, important programs? And

A Share of the Pie

Suffering a bout of job envy? Before you start updating your resumé, find out if your own company might be willing to offer some of the services you've read about here. It may not be as tough for your employer as you think. Services such as on-site dry cleaners won't cost the company anything at all—it just needs to let dry-cleaning vans use a loading dock and carve out a corner of the lobby where people can drop off and pick up clothes. Other benefits, such as medical services, can be provided on an independent contractor basis, so there's no need to hire, say, a team of doctors and nurses. And these services usually flex with the volume generated by your company; SAS's car-detailing guy, for instance, just comes in on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

To develop your case, follow these steps, suggested by Jon Van Cleve, a work/life consultant for Hewitt Associates:

1. Do your homework. Compile a list of the reasons your company should think about on-site conveniences. You'll want to back up your emotions with hard numbers, such as your industry's turnover or your company's absentee rate. Or go national—according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employee tenure fell to 3.6 years in 1998, from 3.8 in

1996. And about 28 percent of all workers over age 16 had been with their current employer only one year or less.

The Internet is also a great source for material. Start your search with "work/life."

2. Size up the competition. Even though many of the companies contacted for this story say they don't base their on-site offerings on what other firms in their area or industry offer, they might think differently if they saw a list on paper—especially if the competition is hiring their workers.

3. Talk to your coworkers. This could range from a chat in the break room to a formal focus group, says Van Cleve. Some questions to ask: What are you struggling with? What services—dry cleaners, doctors, car wash, travel agency, etc.—would make your work/life balance easier, and why?

4. Focus your request. A 1999 Hewitt work/life survey of 1,020 employers showed that 52 percent provided some type of on-site convenience for their workers. We list a few of these services in "Where to Start" (see page 44), with information given by leading providers or trade associations. Obviously, some options, such as a gym, will cost more than others, such as postal services.

what happens to the *real* communities workers live in if they're spending all their time (and money) at the office?

"The main goal of offering these services is to keep employees in the workplace for longer periods of time," says Jim Stockinger, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley. And spending too much of your life at work—whether you're actually working or working out in a gym at the office—simply isn't healthy from a psychological standpoint. "As benevolent and benign and family-like and welcoming as these work environments are, they are still employment," says Stockinger. "Your boss is not 'committed' to you, 'stuck' with you the way your relatives are, and this is still a contingent relationship: contingent on the profitability of your work. The most insidious thing about these [programs] is that they camouflage that and encourage people to forget that."

A company "town within a town" also may have an impact on the larger community as workers eschew local businesses and community projects to get things done at the workplace instead. "The more services offered in a campus environment, the more it's going to have some effect on our downtowns and neighborhood cen-

ters," says urban planner Lisa Davis of Lexington, Massachusetts.

These new types of benefits, while appreciated, aren't necessarily the most popular for working mothers. "The things that come to the top of the list for working mothers are supportive managers who understand they have lives outside of work, and control over one's schedule," says Catalyst's Brumit Kropf. "[Convenience] services are terrific but don't really solve some core problems that some working mothers have," such as affordable child care and flexible scheduling.

Because on-site benefits are so new, there's little data on whether companies are forgoing more important benefits like flextime in their favor, or whether such benefits are creating problems in the larger community



The Dry Cleaner

Larry Barlow is SAS's very own Mr. Clean: employees' on-the-spot point man for suits, shirts, skirts, and whatever else needs dry-cleaning.

because they keep workers in the workplace for longer hours. And while such concerns bear watching, the evidence thus far suggests that the perks are a win for everyone. *(continued on page 92)*

Where to Start

Making the case for on-site conveniences to your employer will be a lot easier if you know the basics, such as how much they might cost and whom to contact for more information.

SERVICE	CONTACT	COST TO COMPANY
ATM	ATM Industry Association, 888-208-1589; or the bank your company uses	Up to \$12,000 for basic cash dispensers; up to \$40,000 for machines with color displays and postage stamps. Maintenance and rent could cost another \$12,000 a year.
Child care	Bright Horizons, 800-324-4386; Aramark Educational Resources, 800-562-8278	Varies depending on size of facility, geography, and whether care will be full-time or part-time. Independent sources say the biggest cost of child care overall is teacher salaries.
Concierge services	Circles, 617-622-6501; LesConcierges, 800-829-1165	Varies depending on number of employees, types of service, and usage. Circles charges the company \$50 to \$250 per user annually.
Dry cleaner	Local dry cleaners	Usually none.

Life Time

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In general, companies that provide on-site benefits are almost always offering them as an add-on to more substantial programs, says Jon Van Cleve, a work/life consultant at Hewitt. "They're not compromising substance for flash," he says. "They see these perks as a way to attract and retain employees above and beyond the other benefits."

And those in close proximity to these new company towns say that rather than stealing business from local shops, companies that offer on-site services help keep a community vibrant. "I only see it as an improvement," says Jeff Bryant, economic development director for the city of Livonia, Michigan, where—in addition to big General Motors and Ford plants—marketing services firm Valassis Communications has a campus with its own doctor's office, nail and hair salons, and dry cleaner. "It creates a multiplier effect, meaning that the people who come here to work spend money at gas stations, stores, etcetera. It's their spendable dollars," says Bryant.

The employees themselves say they don't see such programs as a back-door effort to get them to spend more time in the office. What such services do, they say, is make them more efficient. "If I walk three minutes to the gym rather than drive twenty minutes each way, that's more time I've spent sitting in my office than getting where I need to go," says BMC's Hill. "I know what work I have to get done today, and I'm allowed the flexibility to budget my own time to do everything I need to do." The net result of all this efficiency? More energy to spend on her family, she says. Far from causing any adverse psychological effects, says Hill, "it's made me a much better mom, and I'm happier."

Marketing executive Fawn Batchelor, 35, who works at Deerfield Beach, Florida-based automotive company JM Family Enterprises, agrees. "It's funny, because I think of these services as enhancing the balance between work life and personal life, which I feel is truly the intent," she says, "but overall I see them as more of a morale booster. I can't say that bringing in my dry cleaning has been able to make me produce twenty more projects, but it's made me happier doing it."

"We're creating these programs so people have a higher quality of life outside of the workplace," says BMC spokesman Dan D'Armond. "While you're here you can get things done, so that when you do leave, you'll have more time for family, recreational activities, and so on. There's no clock to punch here."

Of greater concern are charges that such services are rarely provided equally to all employees. Services like dry cleaning or car detailing are often provided at company headquarters but not at satellite offices. On-site child-care centers, for instance, are among the most touted convenience services, says Robert Drago, professor of labor studies at Penn State University, but they are only practical at large corporate campuses, which inevitably leaves many working mothers out of luck. "Here at Penn State, people at the main campus have child care on site, but most of the campuses don't," says Drago.

"On-site services can't be replicated line item for line item from office to office," acknowledges D'Armond, but some companies do try to provide equivalents. At JM Family, doctors



The Doctor

When the sniffles hit or that cough persists, SAS employees don't go far for a checkup; they can walk down to see Dr. Richard Wilson, one of two doctors available on campus.

from headquarters will travel to some of the closer regional offices; other offices will contract with physicians. And SAS subsidizes more than 70 percent of the cost of child care at facilities that don't have room for on-site centers.

Outside concierge services and the Internet have been boons for companies trying to tackle this problem. LesConcierges in San Francisco, for example, contracts with companies to offer employees assistance with virtually anything. LesConcierges will make restaurant reservations, procure theater tickets, or arrange leisure travel—or almost anything else an employee wants. Most concierge services are free to employees, although some firms do charge for complicated errands, usually about \$10 an hour. Professional services firm Ernst & Young has created its own program, called EY/Assist. All 23,000 Ernst & Young employees get free help ranging from convenience services to elder-care referral to federal-tax-controversy consultations 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Other companies offer some personal services through the Internet. Last year SAS, for example, added You Decide.com—a Website at which workers can shop for discounted financial products.

Granted, these benefits are hardly the same as the ability to pick up dry cleaning or drop off your car for an oil change at work, but employers say they are the next best thing for far-flung workers. "[Concierge service] is available nationwide," says SAS spokesman John Dornan. "By contracting out, we're able to give employees access to a huge variety of services we couldn't realistically provide ourselves."

Above all, the success of these "company town" services shows up in happiness and loyalty, which go a long way toward retaining workers—the underlying objective at these companies. If you're lucky enough to work at a company that gives you working-mom-friendly amenities such as hot take-out dinners or on-site laundry services, you might need "one hell of an offer to leave," as BMC's Hill says. And if your company isn't providing such perks, it may be running the risk of losing you to a firm that does. "I'm almost hesitant to tell my friends about what we've got," says JM Family mom Batchelor. "Do they ask me for a referral? Are you kidding? Every day." ■