

'The Biggest Loser' inspires employees to change their lives

CHOCTAW — Pearl River Resort's weight loss challenge was successful in improving the lives of many of its more than 3,000 employees. The program also drew national media attention and now is being expanded to the entire Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians tribe.

Inspired by the popular NBC TV show, "The Biggest Loser," the operations team created a program for the resort's employees to increase morale, reduce health risks and enhance employee job performance. The weight loss challenge is part of the ongoing health and wellness initiatives at the resort, and in May 2013, nearly 675 employees signed up to participate with 1,800 pounds lost in the first week alone.

The 12-week program began in May and ended in July of last year. The top five teams and top five individuals were revealed and celebrated at a grand finale event held in August. A second phase of competition was introduced to associates, the At Home Challenge, which ran from mid-September to mid-November. After a total of 20 weeks, associates had a combined weight loss of 5,884 pounds.

As a result of the program's success, Pearl River Resort garnered national media attention from NBC. Network producers and crew members from the popular weight loss TV show were surprise guests at the resort's grand-finale event. NBC continued to recognize



Winners of the At Home Challenge with Pearl River Resort executives and associates.

Pearl River Resort's efforts by inviting representatives to travel to Culver City, Calif., to attend a live taping of "The Biggest Loser" finale show on Feb. 4.

Among those in attendance at the show's taping will be Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribal Chief **Phylliss J. Anderson** and Pearl River Resort President and CEO **Holly Gagnon**.

"The challenge not only helped many of us to lose weight and live a healthier lifestyle but it was also a great team-building initiative," Gagnon said. "Having NBC's 'The Biggest Loser' as part of our journey and our celebration was a wonderful added bonus, but the real joy

is knowing we have helped change the lives of so many of our employees."

What started as an in-house weight loss challenge has expanded into a larger-scale movement for the entire Choctaw community. The challenge will roll out later this spring to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, a tribe comprised of nearly 10,000 members. Native Americans are the No. 1 ethnic group affected by diabetes, often a leading result of obesity, in the United States. This effort is expected to lower health risks and ease many other health issues in some members of the tribe.

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