

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

**Contact:**

 Leanne Ketterhagen

Senior Marketing & Public Relations Specialist

Phone: 608.210.6638

E-mail: lketterhagen@the-alliance.org

www.the-alliance.org/press

**MERRILL STEEL WINS NATIONAL ALLIANCE 2020 EMPLOYER/PURCHASER EXCELLENCE AWARD**

MADISON, WI. (November 9, 2020) – The Alliance is proud to congratulate Matt Ohrt, VP of HR and Medical Services at Merrill Steel, for receiving the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions 2020 Employer/Purchaser Excellence Award on November 9, 2020. The Alliance nominated Merrill Steel for the award.

The Employer/Purchaser Excellence Award is presented to the employer or purchaser who demonstrates leadership and innovation in advancing overall health and health care value through their approach to benefit programs and design, employee engagement, and support of coalitions efforts. Previous award recipients include The Walt Disney Company, Walmart, Brakebush Brothers, Southwire, East Penn International, and The Boeing Company.

“I feel very fortunate to be part of a company in which the family ownership supports innovative efforts to provide high quality healthcare to employees and their families at transparent, affordable cost,” Ohrt said. “Behind employee wages and steel, health care is our third largest expense, and our ability to manage those costs while achieving high quality health care means better job stability, healthier families, and overall financial success.”

In 2016, when commercial bids for a building remodel came in exorbitantly high, Ohrt stepped in and served as the general contractor for the company’s first 1,800-square-foot on-site clinic, which enabled them to proceed and build the clinic at half the quoted cost. What started essentially as an empty, outdated storage area, now occupies a large clinical space in their main office to provide a large variety of clinical services. Since then, he’s been able to save his organization’s total health care costs by over $4 million in just four years, and his employees and their families more than $500,000 over that same time period. Their total average medical claims decreased by nearly 44% in just a three-year span – partly in credit to Astia Health, their clinic provider, which offers a wide variety of services targeted at Merrill Steel’s unique employee population.

Ohrt realized that a high percentage of his employee’s health costs came from things like X-Rays, MRIs, bloodwork, and prescriptions, so he gave his employees access to these services – both on-site and mobile. Ohrt purchased an ambulance and turned it into a mobile health clinic that makes house calls to individuals. The mobile clinic provides his employees with unique and convenient access to health care services and saves both Merrill Steel and its employees' money from expensive ER and urgent care claims. Additionally, he implemented physical therapy and chiropractic at their on-site clinic to support employee musculoskeletal health due to the nature and physicality of working in a steel fabrication shop.

“We nominated Matt for this award because he’s a true innovator in providing the best health benefits possible for all of his employees,” said Melina Kambitsi Ph.D., SVP of Business Development and Strategic Marketing at The Alliance. “We are thrilled he’s being recognized for having the courage to think outside of the box and do what’s right for the company and the health of their employees.”

“Merrill Steel has shown how an activated employer has the power to build, influence, and drive value while improving the health and health care experience of their employees,” said Michael Thompson, President & CEO, National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions.

Ohrt’s strategy for 2021 is to align with partners that think like Merrill Steel and are unafraid of change. His desire to change networks started by creating a Local Best Practices group to help bring employers together to learn from one another. He wants to partner with high-quality, transparent, and competitively priced providers so that employees have more options.

On October 1, 2020, Ohrt received a Health Transformation Award from The Alliance and their Board of Directors, recognizing his significant contributions to transforming health care in his community.

The Alliance serves as the voice for self-funded employers who want more control over their costs. They provide transparent, creative approaches to network and benefit plan design to unlock savings where others can’t – or won’t – using Smarter NetworksSM and sophisticated data mining and analysis. The Alliance is owned by 275+ employers throughout the Midwest and remains a trusted, objective partner for employers and their brokers who seek improved access to high-quality healthcare, contracting with over 34,000 health care providers and specialists in the region.

Merrill Steel is one of the largest steel fabricators in the U.S. and has been a leader in the structural steel fabrication industry for more than five decades. Now in their third generation of family ownership, they’re able to offer fully integrated engineering, detailing, project management, fabrication, specialized coatings, delivery, and erection services.

The National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions is the only nonprofit, purchaser-led organization with a national and regional structure dedicated to driving health and health care value across the country. Its members represent private and public sector, nonprofit, and Taft-Hartley organizations, and more than 45 million Americans, spending over $300 billion annually on healthcare.

###