

The summer picnic is back at many Madison companies

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Many local companies host their summer get-togethers at Warner Park for Madison Mallards games.

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The tepid economic recovery hasn't translated into wage hikes for many workers, but one perk is apparently making a comeback: the company picnic.

About 60 percent of private employers are offering some sort of summer event this year, according to a survey from the **Society of Human Resource Management**.

That's up from 55 percent in 2011 when many firms were **still reeling from the Great Recession** although still down from a decade ago when nearly two-thirds of employers held a company picnic.

The survey looked at all sizes of organizations to get a statistically accurate sampling of American companies.

"The company picnic hasn't disappeared," says Kate Kennedy, media manager for the HR group based in Alexandria, Va.

Epic Systems, the Madison area's largest employer with some 7,400 staffers, didn't hold back on its picnic after booking \$1.6 billion in sales in 2013. Employees and their guests dined on steak, lobster or vegetable panini at the alcohol-free event held last weekend at the company's sprawling Verona headquarters.

The kid-friendly event also included miniature train rides and an elaborate petting zoo featuring a variety of barnyard animals, **according to InBusiness**.

Madison's second-largest private sector employer, American Family Insurance, held its company picnic on July 12 at Warner Park where employees had access to a full day of events before attending the Madison Mallards baseball game in the evening.

"It's the first time we've done the Mallards thing and we combined with a United Way charity run into the morning," says American Family spokeswoman Sandra Spann.

CUNA Mutual Group also held its summer event at the "Duck Pond" in what has become an annual event for the credit union insurance company and one of the bigger group nights of the year at Warner Park.

"We've taken the traditional company picnic to another level," says spokesman Rick Uhlmann.

Mallards president Vern Stenman says company outings have been a key driver of the team's success from the beginning.

"Our first crowd of over 2,000 people was driven by a Meriter company picnic and almost every large employer in the Madison area has booked some kind of outing with us over the years," he says.



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Yet while company picnics may have changed, some of the old rules still exist. For example, don't drink too much or complain about your job where a supervisor might overhear.

"How you act during these types of company events can help or hinder your career," writes career advisor Lisa Quast in [a recent post for Forbes](#).

Quast advises dressing for success, counseling the family in advance on proper behavior and leaving the dog at home.

"Many people don't think twice about how they should act at company events, such as a spring or summer picnic," she says. "News flash: It's not just a company picnic – it's a 'business' event."

Which might explain why some people just skip the thing entirely.

