

# Flexibility Fuels Employee Development

## Kum & Go turns to Upper Iowa University to provide educational services.

### *The Company*

Kum & Go



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### *The Supplier*

Upper Iowa University



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In 1959, W.A. Krause and his father-in-law Tony Gentle opened their first gas station in Hampton, Iowa. That first station had a gravel parking lot, no canopies covering the pumps, and no array of food and beverages that current stores offer. Known today as Kum & Go, that first station evolved into a chain of stores committed to customer convenience.

Today, Kum & Go is the largest family-owned company in Iowa, and one of the largest convenience store chains in the United States. It comprises more than 430 stores in 13 states, and employs more than 3,000 associates. In addition, Kum & Go was one of the first convenience store chains to use scanners, electronic invoicing, and computer-assisted ordering.

Today, Krause Holdings has expanded beyond the convenience store business to include a fuel transportation company, soccer team, touch-play lottery, and coffee company. And because plans for future growth are no less aggressive, CEO Kyle J. Krause decided to pursue a more highly educated workforce. At the same time, however, the executive team did not want to exclude its highly valued, but less formally educated, associates.

To address that issue, Jean Baker, director of education and development, revised the tuition reimbursement program and eligibility requirements.

The eligibility requirements are designed to encourage associates, who are truly committed to the organization and serious about moving up within Kum & Go, to obtain their degrees while continuing to work full time. The program reimburses eligible students 100 percent of their tuition if they receive either an A or a B grade. Associates earning a C receive a 50 percent reimbursement.

“Previously, we reimbursed grades based on an A, B, C, or D breakdown of 100 percent, 75 percent, 50 percent, and 25 percent, respectively,” says Baker. “We changed that schedule because a B is a really good grade for someone who is working full time, and who also may have family or community obligations. We didn’t want someone dropping out because they couldn’t afford to pay for a B. On the other hand, because this program is designed to be a true *investment* in the human capital aspect of the business, we didn’t feel like we wanted to reward students for anything less than a C.”

The next step in the process was to locate a school that would meet the needs of the organization. It needed to be an accredited institution that offers associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees. Online programs were also a requirement, because of the company’s geographically dispersed workforce. Finally, Kum & Go

was looking for an educational institution that had a strong history of excellence, and was affordable and flexible.

Upper Iowa University (UIU) began, as Kum & Go did, in small town Iowa. Founded in 1857, it has grown into the largest Iowa-based regionally accredited non-public university. Since the 1920s, UIU has pioneered off-campus outreach programs that offer educational opportunities to those unable to attend the main campus. UIU continues with its original residential campus in Fayette, Iowa, and now includes numerous learning centers in Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Louisiana. In addition, it has two dis-

Kum & Go’s full-time employees can earn degrees while working and spending time with their families.

tance learning programs—a traditional correspondence course program and its online program. Through these two distance education programs, the university serves students worldwide. And because it incorporates learning technologies, the university serves both traditional students and working adults.

UIU offers numerous undergraduate majors including a variety of business disciplines, several public administration fields, and other areas including social services. It also offers a number of graduate degrees, including a master of business administration degree with a choice of six areas of emphasis and a master of public administration degree that includes four areas of emphasis.

Another reason why Kum & Go chose UIU is because the university offers associate- and baccalaureate-level programs

as well as graduate degrees with multiple course modalities to fit employee schedules. In addition, UIU is recognized by the United States Department of Education: The university is regionally accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association. Its business degree programs hold further accreditation from the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education, and the university is a member of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration.

Working with Kum & Go also fits in with UIU's corporate community initiatives. The university already provides on-site courses at a number of corporate facilities. Other relationships involve special tuition prices for corporate partner employees at UIU learning centers and distance education programs.

Rick Eftink, one of UIU's recruiters and transfer advisors, worked with Baker of Kum & Go to develop a program that fits the company's specific objectives and needs. Because of their varied and changing schedules, Kum & Go employees needed flexibility in course scheduling. Through this partnership they can take courses in any of the modalities UIU offers, and they can move among modalities as their schedules change. Each UIU course, whether offered online, through correspondence, or in a classroom, has the same learning outcomes and objectives. That ensures that each student experiences the same learning experience. As part of the agreement, UIU also designed a tuition billing procedure that meshes with Kum & Go's tuition reimbursement policy, to provide a seamless process for employees.

"We are very encouraged with the results so far," says Eftink. "The program allows Kum & Go's full-time employees to earn their degrees while working at their jobs and spending time with their families. They have up to six months to complete the correspondence courses, and they can work on the online courses any time of the day that fits their schedules. Kum & Go's employees can only benefit from this opportunity to advance their educations ... and Kum & Go benefits as well."