

John Penn

DIRECTOR, HEALTH FITNESS CORPORATION

One day, I realized I was kind of like a harbor pilot, taking boats to dock and then back out to sea," says John Penn of his service as a director.

Consider his work with Health Fitness Corporation, a Minneapolis-based fitness and health-management company. Penn joined the company's board in 2001, just as it was emerging from a turnaround orchestrated by Manchester Companies, a Minneapolis management consulting firm. Health Fitness had divested three business units and sharpened its focus on the corporate health-services marketplace. It also had reorganized its board and brought in new management.

"The Health Fitness turnaround had really happened as I came on the board. But I liked the challenge of helping take it to higher levels," says Penn, who served as Health Fitness's chairman from January 2004 to May 2006. He continues to serve as a director.

Mark Sheffert, Manchester's chairman and CEO and a Health Fitness director, credits Penn with helping Health Fitness to make what he terms a "David and Goliath" acquisition of its largest competitor, the Health and Fitness Services Division of New Jersey-based Johnson & Johnson Healthcare Systems, in 2003. The deal doubled Health Fitness's revenues and client base.

"He believes in trying to pull the best thinking out of people," Sheffert says of Penn. "He's a good listener—he listens to everyone's viewpoints and then helps drive us to more of a consensus."

In 2005, under Penn's leadership, Health Fitness fortified its market position by purchasing HealthCalc.net, a Web-based provider of fitness, health-management, and wellness programs. At



year's end, Health Fitness reported revenues of \$54.9 million, up from \$25.9 million in 2001. "I'm energized by these kinds of transitions," says Penn, who adds that "my strength is really to deal with that challenging period."

Sheffert and Penn met eight years ago, when Penn was board chairman for St. Paul-based Medical Graphics Corporation, a struggling medical-device company that was purchased in 1999 by Angeion, a former implantable-defibrillator maker also headquartered in St. Paul. Manchester was enlisted to turn the combined company around. "When we come in, it's necessary to redefine the culture of an organization, so there's a lot of anxiety," Sheffert says. Penn, he adds, brings

Penn, who holds an MBA from Dartmouth, is particularly energized by the challenges of company turnarounds.

"a calming, solidifying, coalescing kin presence and style" to such situations.

Penn retired in 2005 as CEO of In Plastics, a Hastings company that makes plastic components for a variety of industries. He's still Intek's chairman, remains an Angeion director, and serves on several other boards. "Sure, I'm rewarded," Penn says of his board service. "But the satisfaction of contributing to an organization and helping it carry on a greater good is really the reward I seek, and get."