



*HUR's turnkey SmartZone
is a Smart Card-enabled
strength-training center*

HUR Health and Fitness Equipment

offers a 'Smart' solution
for active aging

Through its Smart Card system, this global company integrates 'hardware' and 'software' components to provide testing, training and outcomes reporting for balance and physical exercise



This is the third article in a series profiling the recipients of the 2012 ICAA Innovators Awards. Launched by the International Council on Active Aging® in 2003, ICAA's awards recognize creativity and excellence in active aging, honoring innovations that are leading the way, setting new standards and making a difference in the lives of older adults. These offerings target any or all of the seven dimensions of wellness—namely, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, vocational and environmental wellness.

When CEO Colin Milner founded the International Council on Active Aging® (ICAA) in 2001, he aimed to connect like-minded organizations and professionals across sectors to form an industry dedicated to better health, wellness and quality of life for older adults. Among the active-aging industry's natural allies were providers of products and services. At that time, however, health and wellness solutions—so vital to advancing active aging—were too often

nonexistent for this market or a poor fit to address its diverse needs and aspirations. To encourage providers to learn more about the age 50-plus population and to evolve in their thinking and offerings, ICAA launched an award to recognize creative products and services for the active older adult. The most recent recipient of ICAA's Innovative Solutions Award is HUR Health and Fitness Equipment's Smart Card System, integrated with HUR strength machines and iBalance Testing Systems.

"Many companies have aligned themselves with ICAA and the active-aging movement over the years," says Milner. "Through their offerings, these forward-thinking organizations support older men and women in living as fully as possible regardless of age, health conditions or functional limitations. HUR is one such company. By continuing to develop and refine their products for active aging, they are helping to drive the industry forward."

A global enterprise, HUR got its start in 1989 at the Helsinki University of Technology, now part of Finland's Aalto University. (HUR's name, in fact, is an acronym for Helsinki University Research.) The company's stated mission "is to be the world's leading supplier of exercise solutions to the senior, rehabilitation and age 40-plus wellness markets."¹

"HUR's product and software development is based on research and customer feedback," says Juha Vaisanen, president of HUR Health and Fitness Equipment USA, based in Northbrook, Illinois. "We continue to work hard to provide superior solutions for our customers to implement effective, fun, social and measurable active-aging programs addressing issues like independence, functionality, falls, continence and physical therapy." Vaisanen believes that, when integrated, HUR's Smart Card software, computerized exercise machines, and balance and isometric testing systems offer "a

comprehensive solution" to implement these programs.

To learn more about HUR's "smart" solution for active aging, the *Journal on Active Aging®* recently spoke to Vaisanen about this award-winning system and what it offers.

JAA: Please give us a little background about HUR's Smart Card solution.

JV: The HUR Smart Card System sets up HUR's computerized Smart Card strength-exercise machines and iBalance system—sets, repetitions, resistance, heart rate limit, balance training programs—promoting independent exercise and lowering overhead costs. The Smart Card System also records all activity on the machines for reporting and for measuring outcomes.

HUR's exercise machines use "Natural Transmission™," a mechanism that replaces the weight plates, cams and pulleys used in weight-stack machines with a pneumatic, or compressed air, system of resistance. This type of system results in low impact on the body's joints and connective tissues. We also strive to make our equipment broadly inclusive for individuals with different levels of function and physical abilities, as well as those undergoing physical therapy.

Users benefit from age-friendly features such as:

- near zero to seamless (stepless) increases in resistance
- separate resistance for both extremes
- easy on/easy off
- few adjustments
- nonintimidating appearance

The strength machines also allow isometric testing to measure muscular strength. In addition, HUR's iBalance

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To support fall prevention programs, HUR iBalance Systems offer computerized balance testing and interactive training modes that allow customers to monitor and evaluate clients for posture and stability

Systems provide baseline testing of, and continued monitoring, evaluation and training for, proper posture and stability for falls prevention.

JAA: *What were HUR's objectives for the feedback and data management solutions provided through the Smart Card System?*

JV: At HUR, we believe that machines without the software to set them up, capture exercise data and measure outcomes will be obsolete in the next few years. Users need feedback, management needs the ability to evaluate wellness programs and wellness center utilization, and third-party reimbursement systems require accurate outcomes data.

User feedback, for example, is a main incentive to keep people exercising. It is not enough for users just to feel better or stronger; they want to see progress reports and the screen flashing "Well done! You exceeded your targets!"

Management needs to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of wellness programs and compare activities between multiple locations. Wellness centers are not cost centers; they are profit centers—especially when more and more senior living organizations are opening their wellness and rehabilitation centers to the local age 50-plus community. This is no different than following costs and opportunities related to meals, house-keeping, utilities, and the like.

JAA: *How is the Smart Card System integrated with HUR's strength exercise machines and iBalance system?*

JV: Currently, the Smart Card System controls our strength exercise machines and balance training systems. Also, our new Main Line machines, which are noncomputerized, can be upgraded later to include the Smart Card System. This is important to those organizations that may not have the means to invest in computerized machines now, but may want to do that down the road. We already have several cardio machines with the HUR Smart Card System, but they are not available in the United States. Plus we will launch a "Cloud-based" version of the Smart Card System later this year.

We have also incorporated the Smart Card software into our SmartZone, a strength-training center in a turnkey package. Among the SmartZone's features are a touch-screen computer kiosk, where users log in and select their training programs; and color touch screens with animated exercise displays to motivate and assist beginning exercisers. Training programs are updated automatically to match users' goals and progress.

HUR's Smart Card System: three key selling points for the active-aging industry

1. Offers a comprehensive solution to implement active-aging programs.
2. Provides accurate outcomes data.
3. Allows organizations to implement fun, social and effective active-aging programs.

With iBalance, we try to keep things simple and easy to use. For professionals and users, the iBalance Smart Card training system appears in the Smart Card System, like any other machine. The individual just slides the card into the card reader, and the balance testing system automatically sets the desired training programs. In effect, you have all data in one system, which you can export to other IT [information technology] systems.

JAA: *How does HUR design its strength exercise machines to be accessible to users with different levels of physical function?*

JV: HUR recognized a long time ago that air-resistance technology provides compelling features that promote inclusivity: low-impact exercising, low starting resistance, light weight—and as an added benefit, small footprint and dual function machines. In addition, we pay a lot of attention to ergonomic design. Believe it or not, there is a lot of technology in cushions.

Our equipment's accessibility is also in the details. As an example, a few years ago we moved the arms starting point on the chest press machines 2" forward to make it easier for older adults to start

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Are you an active-aging innovator? The International Council on Active Aging® invites you to enter the 2013 ICAA Innovators Awards competition. Through this annual awards program, ICAA recognizes achievements by those who are leading the way, setting new standards and making a difference in the lives of older adults. Winning innovations may target any or all of the seven dimensions of wellness—physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, vocational and environmental wellness.

ICAA selects recipients in three award categories:

- The **Innovators Achievement Award** (previously the Innovators

Award) is presented to individuals or organizations responsible for an innovative program or concept that has advanced the cause of active aging. Examples include wellness programs, health promotion and marketing campaigns, and education programs, among others.

- The **Innovators Green Award** goes to an individual or organization that has demonstrated environmental stewardship. Examples include creating or implementing the use of products, services, processes, designs or programs for environmental wellness.
- The **Innovators Practical Solutions Award** (previously the Innovative Solutions Award) recognizes an in-

dividual or organization that has demonstrated creativity in designing and executing a specific product or service to improve older-adult well-being. (Applicants must be an ICAA Preferred Business Partner or advertiser.)

To be considered for an award, please go to www.icaa.cc/awards.htm and complete the online application form. Select the award category in the “Type of application” box to reveal details about the application process, plus additional sections of the form to complete. The deadline for entries is September 9, 2013. Winners will be announced by October 19, 2013.



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Programs are loaded onto the HUR SmartCard with the use of a touch-screen computer. The system offers both templates and the ability to customize programs

exercise. We added range limiters to all machines to make them safer and easier to use. We prefer front-loaded machines, knowing that it is an issue when people with functional limitations need to move sideways. And we have a full line of wheelchair-accessible machines for inclusive fitness, which are great for obese users as well.

JAA: Does HUR provide information, training or support to help professionals maximize the benefits of a Smart Card-enabled system for older users?

JV: We have strengthened our staff by hiring an education and training director to ensure customers will get training to use all features of the Smart Card

System. We were lucky to find an individual who has worked in a senior housing community for several years and can provide tips on how to do the exercises in the most effective way. Customers receive training both at their sites and online. We are also starting to implement regional HUR Training Meetings later this year.

It's also important to know that our product development is based on research and customer feedback. HUR works closely with leading sports research centers and universities to provide better solutions to customers and back up marketing.

JAA: How does HUR pursue its mission to be a leading provider of exercise solutions for the older-adult market?

JV: The older-adult and medical fitness markets are the fastest-growing segments of fitness, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. We want to be the leader in these markets. Let's be frank, though: Talking about issues like functionality, fall prevention, continence or dementia is not sexy. But, as we know, each year one in three age 65-plus Americans falls.² Falling is also the number one cause of death due to injury for this population² and the top liability issue for long-term care residences and hospitals.³ Our customers are very serious about falls. While they recognize that they cannot prevent falls in older adults, they can reduce the number of these events and mitigate their consequences. But they need tools to implement fall prevention programs—and HUR provides those tools.

We also continue to pursue designs that enhance low starting resistance and increments, low-impact, easy on/easy off, safe and nonintimidating machines. Our software development is driven by the desire to make our software as user-friendly as possible while providing accurate outcomes data.

JAA: Finally, in your view, how does the Smart Card System, integrated with HUR's strength exercise machines and balance testing, help advance active aging and the active-aging industry?

JV: The active-aging industry is driven by the leading providers in healthcare systems, senior living organizations and medical fitness centers, complemented by equipment manufacturers. And don't forget ICAA! We are lucky to have very professional and demanding customers. We simply need to listen to our customers' needs and desires and continue to work hard to provide better solutions.

As an industry leader, it is HUR's commitment to continue to provide our customers with the best tools we can to implement programs, measure outcomes, and support their business growth.♦

The Journal on Active Aging thanks Juha Vaisanen and Kathy Bauer of HUR Health and Fitness Equipment USA for their help with this article. For more information about the company and its active-aging solutions, visit www.hurusa.com.

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Images courtesy of HUR Health and Fitness Equipment