

AthletiCo keeps Chicagoland dancers in perfect form

By Sarah M. Wolff

*"I was fortunate enough to connect with AthletiCo...
Any sports therapist just will not do. Dancers are a different breed."*

—Cheryl Mann (at right)
Hubbard Street Dance Chicago

Photo courtesy of
Hubbard Street Dance Chicago

The Joffrey Ballet. Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. The Chicago Bulls. The Chicago Cubs. These are just a few of the big-name Chicagoland performing arts and sports organizations served by AthletiCo—a comprehensive provider of outpatient, orthopedic rehabilitation.



Keeping dancers dancing

AthletiCo was founded in 1991 by Mark Kaufman, MS, PT, ATC. Seventeen years later, AthletiCo is going strong, with more than 45 Chicagoland locations and a straightforward mission that provides real results. According to Maxine Olhava, AthletiCo public relations manager, AthletiCo exists “to provide exceptional, progressive and cost-effective outpatient rehabilitation and fitness services through personalized care that emphasizes patient education and prevention of future injury.”

Behind the scenes

AthletiCo proudly complements Chicago's rich performing arts tradition with rehabilitation and ongoing care that keeps dancers in tip-top shape, regardless of the type of performance. For several years, AthletiCo has been providing large dance companies—such as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, the Joffrey Ballet, and Broadway in Chicago productions—as well as smaller dance organizations—such as DanceWorks Chicago, Luna Negra, and River North Chicago Dance Company—with much-needed behind-the-scenes assistance. According to Carol Czaplicki, AthletiCo director of marketing, AthletiCo provides physical therapists, certified athletic trainers or massage therapists for rehearsals and performances, offering on-site consultation and injury evaluation, rehearsal and performance coverage, dance injury management, technique evaluation and retraining, dance massage therapy, Pilates-evolved rehabilitation and educational seminars.

AthletiCo is hard at work keeping Hubbard Street Dance Chicago's dancers flexible and healthy throughout rehearsals and performances. “For rehearsals, we provide physical therapy or athletic training coverage, and for performances we provide physical therapy or massage therapy,” said Josh Niemi, AthletiCo affiliations manager. AthletiCo has also started to travel with the company for their international tours and several domestic tours. In addition, AthletiCo provides Hubbard Street dancers with various medical-based lectures and services relating to core strengthening, flexibility, injury prevention and nutrition.

Through thick and thin

Cheryl Mann, a recently retired professional dancer with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, first began working with AthletiCo in 1995. “I knew from that moment on that I was in good hands, working with therapists who really knew what I needed,” she said.

For more than 12 years, Mann relied on AthletiCo to keep her aligned and strong. “Dance is a highly physical sport, without the padding and the arch support of an athletic shoe, so we often end the day with injuries that need to be tended to directly, efficiently and quickly in order to perform the next day,” she said. “Julie O’Connell, my AthletiCo PT, has been there through thick and thin... keeping my spirits high and getting me back on stage before anyone thought it possible. I trust her completely. It’s so important to find therapists whom you trust, and I am forever grateful to have AthletiCo to turn to.” Mann was also impressed by AthletiCo’s commitment to care outside of the dance hall. “They expedite trips to doctors, MRI requests and any other urgent appointments you may need to make. They have incredible relationships with the best doctors Chicago has to offer...dancers are a different breed. AthletiCo’s dance medicine program is a blessing.”

Moving safely, smoothly with optimal strength

According to Niemi, AthletiCo also provides coverage to the Joffrey Ballet with a physical therapist, certified athletic trainer, and/or massage therapist during each rehearsal and during performances. “AthletiCo is on site for every rehearsal when the Joffrey Ballet is in season, and we also travel with the company providing coverage for their domestic tours,” he said.

For nearly two decades, AthletiCo has kept Chicagoland dancers moving safely, smoothly and with optimal strength. AthletiCo’s expert clinicians take great pride in their pragmatic, efficient approaches to injury rehabilitation, as well as in teaching dancers to prevent injury through proper preparation and self-awareness. Whether it’s classical ballet, modern interpretive dance or a classic Broadway routine, AthletiCo is proud to keep Chicagoland dancers moving to the beat.

Proof positive: in one dancer's words

I have worked with AthletiCo exclusively for the last seven years or so. I am a dancer with River North Chicago Dance Company and have danced professionally for 18 years. In that time, my body has endured quite a bit of physical stress and trauma. I have had many injuries as a dancer, (some worse than others including: torn ligaments and tendons in knees and ankle, and a painful disc herniation). But because of AthletiCo’s highly knowledgeable and professional staff, I am able to continue to dance stronger than ever. I am also a lot more educated about my body and therefore believe their care will help provide a better quality of life after a vigorous, physical dance career. With that said, AthletiCo also goes above and beyond to educate in injury prevention. They do this by working with and teaching athletes and professional artists exercises of strength, stability and agility. Not only do they work with us in the clinic, but they provide

care weekly, on site, while in strict rehearsal and also during in-town performances so that we may be able to do our job the best we can. The staff of AthletiCo takes special care in understanding how the body of a dancer needs to perform and function at very high levels of strength and flexibility. They understand that dancers are highly trained athletes and that this is our livelihood. I have to say that I would not be dancing today if it weren’t for AthletiCo and their constant care and support of the performing artist. Their dedication to injury prevention, care and well-being is most admirable and deeply appreciated.

— Mari Jo Irbe. River North Chicago Dance Company,
Dancer and Rehearsal Director



AthletiCo Clinicians frequently take their services "on the road," working with dancers in rehearsal halls and performance venues to help keep them strong, healthy and correctly aligned. AthletiCo is truly committed to providing personalized care that emphasizes patient education and injury prevention. This personal approach is demonstrated above at DanceWorks Chicago.



Promoting health and preventing injury on the court, field, course and ice

AthletiCo also has a major stake in Chicago’s sports scene, assisting and providing physical therapy, athletic training and massage therapy for every professional sports team in Chicago. “AthletiCo became affiliated with Chicago’s major sports teams through our relationships with team personnel/medical staff and their need for supplemental staffing,” said Mark Kaufman, AthletiCo president. Hughie O’Malley, director of sports medicine for the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), described the relationship between AthletiCo and the USSF as “a tremendous benefit to the elite athletes within the USSF from the AthletiCo athletic training and massage therapy services provided” as well as “an invaluable and magnificent relationship for both entities.”

Just as in the world of professional dancing, AthletiCo treats each professional sports team based upon its unique needs—

be it providing physical therapists, certified athletic trainers, strength and conditioning staff, massage therapists, or nutritionists. “Each team is unique in the services we provide, and the services are dependent upon the team’s medical needs,” said Czaplicki.

AthletiCo’s impact upon Chicagoland athletes does not stop with professional sports teams and professional performing arts organizations. According to Niemi, AthletiCo also serves more than 125 Chicagoland organizations/affiliations with “some type of rehabilitation, fitness, and performance service.” Youth sports teams, high schools, colleges, golf associations, endurance organizations and major Chicago-area events benefit from AthletiCo’s athletic training, massage therapy, physical therapy, performance enhancement, or nutrition services.

AthletiCo provides rehabilitation, fitness and performance services to several of the professional sports teams, events, and associations in Chicago.

- Chicago Bears, National Football League
- Chicago Blackhawks, National Hockey League
- Chicago Bulls, National Basketball Association
- Chicago Cubs, Major League Baseball
- Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA)
- Chicago Fire, Major League Soccer
- Chicago Force, Independent Women’s Football League
- Chicago Machine, Major League Lacrosse
- Chicago Sky, Women’s National Basketball League
- Chicago Storm, Major Indoor Soccer League
- Chicago White Sox, Major League Baseball
- Illinois PGA
- Bank of America Open—A Nationwide Tour Event
- U.S. Soccer



Chicago athletes and patients stay strong and healthy with help from AthletiCo's professionals, who utilize the best equipment and supplies in the industry. AthletiCo has more than 45 unique locations in the metro area.

Maintaining strength, stability and success for Chicagoland athletes and residents

By contributing to Chicago's performing arts groups, professional sports teams, clubs and organizations, high schools, colleges and more, AthletiCo has become a driving force behind the ongoing health of Chicagoland athletes of all ages and experience levels, as well as the non-athlete patient population. And AthletiCo has no plans to stop growing and helping Chicagoland residents through proven and emerging treatments. "Every location has physical therapy, orthopedic rehabilitation, sports medicine, athletic training outreach and work rehabilitation," said Olhava. "Many locations offer massage therapy, work conditioning and spine control classes. Depending on the staff certification and the size of the clinic, additional services are offered when possible. Each location tailors their services to their population of customers and their customers' unique needs."

Patterson Medical is proud to provide AthletiCo several essential pieces of equipment and "most of the supplies they use on a daily basis," said Matt Holtz, Patterson Medical rehab sales consultant for the Chicago area. "AthletiCo creates clinics for true sports performance and rehabilitation care. They go for the highest-quality products and strive to create the best environment possible," he said.

AthletiCo prides itself on providing industry-leading equipment, including:

- The Alter-G, an anti-gravitational treadmill that enables users to reduce their body weight during exercise to continue training during injury recovery
- The Portable K-Vest, a wireless motion analysis and training system used at AthletiCo's Golf Performance Center, developed by Bentley Kinetics, a leader in kinetic motion analysis
- Video Gait Analysis, using industry leader Dartfish software to perform gait and biomechanical analysis for runners
- Precor® AMT™ machines, which combine the functionality of a treadmill, elliptical and stair-stepper
- The LifeFitness Dual Adjustable Pulley, which is helpful in building functional movement and work rehabilitation protocols

President Kaufman is particularly proud of the numerous factors that differentiate AthletiCo from its major competitors. "We continually strive to be the best provider of rehabilitation, fitness and performance services in the Chicagoland area. We recognize that we

can do better at everything we do. And we recognize the challenge...to be better while respecting our core values of patient service, collaborative teamwork and accountability," he said. Additional catalysts for AthletiCo's ongoing success include: its dedication to creating new and maintaining existing affiliations, devotion to staff continuing education, expanded work injury offerings, research and charity endeavors, its extensive array of services and employee ownership and management.

The need for AthletiCo's valuable services is sure to stay strong. Student athletes will require athletic training to maintain peak performance. Injured workers will require rehabilitation to get back to work. Children and adults with medical conditions will require physical and occupational therapy to maximize their independence. Through its unending professionalism and dedication to personal one-on-one attention for every patient, AthletiCo is sure to impact Chicagoland's physical health for years to come.



AthletiCo specializes in providing optimal patient comfort and care. From the rehabilitation area to the friendly employees, everything at each AthletiCo lets patients know they are truly priority number one.

Facility Profile

AthletiCo
Founded 1991
More than 45 Chicagoland locations;
headquarters in Oak Brook, Ill.

288 physical therapists
58 occupational therapists
17 physical therapy assistants
142 certified athletic trainers

AthletiCo therapists are active in:

- The Illinois Physical Therapy Association
- The American Physical Therapy Association
- The American Occupational Therapist Association
- The American Society of Hand Therapists
- The National Athletic Trainers Association
- And other industry affiliations

Rehabilitation services:

- Physical therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Work rehabilitation
- Women's health therapy
- Vestibular rehabilitation
- Pediatric physical therapy
- Spine control class

Outreach services:

- Athletic Training Outreach
- Endurance
- Performing Arts
- Golf
- Overhead Athlete

Fitness services:

- Sports Performance Center at McCook
- Golf Performance Center at Oak Brook
- Garfield Ridge Fitness Center
- St. Charles Fitness Center
- Arlington Heights Fitness Center
- Gold Coast/Near North Fitness Center
- Massage Therapy
- Personal Training
- Performance Enhancement
- Nutrition Education



At AthletiCo's Corporate Office (from left): Josh Niemi, Affiliations Manager; Carol Czaplicki, Director of Marketing; Matt Holtz, Rehab Sales Consultant, Sammons Preston; Mark Kaufman, AthletiCo President, and Marc DeLozier, Senior Inventory Coordinator.



AthletiCo locations are found in freestanding buildings, existing shopping areas/strip centers, doctors' offices, athletic clubs, and office buildings.
Photos courtesy of AthletiCo