

Walking program seeks residents up to challenge

Participants can gain better health and prizes by taking part

BY LAYLA FARMER
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It's time for Forsyth County residents to "step up" to the plate again and prepare to hit a homerun for their health and well-being.

The Forsyth County Department of Public Health's Healthy Community Coalition held the kick-off for Step Up Forsyth on Saturday at Hanes Hosiery Community Center.

"It's a community-wide, eight-week walking and exercise program," explained Willard Tanner, coordinator of the local Healthy Communities Coalition. "We encourage them to walk about 30 minutes a day at least five days per week, within the eight-week period of the program."

Residents can sign up as individuals or join a Step Up team. Participants are asked to record the distance they walk each day; prizes are given at the end of each week to individual walkers and teams with the highest numbers, Tanner says.

"There's a final incentive at the very end of the eight week period where we will look at the number of minutes that an entire team has walked as a total of minutes as well



Mary Turner out-walked everyone else last year.

as the number of hours that they have walked," he explained. "We also gave a final, grand prize to an individual walker that had the (highest) number of minutes for an individual walker."

Seventy-seven year-old Mary Turner of Kernersville won the individual competition last year. Turner is no stranger to competition. In fact, she is used to winning. She holds the women's record for the most weight lifted at the Kernersville YMCA and the state title in racquet-

ball at the Senior Olympics, among other things.

Turner says her participation in last year's Step Up Forsyth seemed like an obvious choice.

"I just heard about it and I sent in my card and I did it," she said matter-of-factly. "Everybody knows me as walking more than anybody."

Turner says she walks around eight miles a day on average, in addition to hitting the gym and participating in other physical activities.

"I've always been very active," she remarked. "I have to walk, what, four miles to go to school and I guess I just got used to walking."

Turner also subs regularly as a PE teacher in the Winston-Salem / Forsyth County School system.

"They call me to sub for them all the time because they feel I can do a better job than anybody," she commented.

Age hasn't slowed the robust senior, who has accomplished things many, much younger people could only dream of.

"I've traveled all over the world, so it's no big deal," said Turner. "I walked through the Himalayas all by myself. I went to Antarctica - no big deal."

Widowed just over a year ago, Turner says she has found comfort in her demanding physical routines.

"He was a great guy; I miss him so much - that's the reason I get out and keep on the move all time," she said of her late husband, James L. Turner. "I have to get out of the house just to socialize with people."

More than 570 people participated in last year's event. Tanner hopes to increase that number by 25 percent this year.

Seeing the obvious enthusiasm Turner has for all things fitness, he requested that she lead a Step Up Team this year. Not surprisingly, she agreed.

"He said to ... get as many people as I can to be on a team, but most of the people just want to be on my



Willard Tanner

team, so we're going to have a big team from the 'Y,'" she related. "I've gotten about 25 people on my list already."

Turner says she hopes to be able to impart some of her own fervor to her fellow teammates.

"I'm just going to try to encourage other people to walk more," she remarked. "I think it's important for people to get out and walk if they won't do anything else."

Tanner says he hopes that those who participate in this year's Step Up Forsyth will form habits and friendships that will last far beyond the realm of the program itself.

Kids/HIV

facts about HIV and sexual contact. HIV is transmitted by having unprotected sex. This must include the details of what that phrase means. Unprotected sex is oral, anal or vaginal contact without the use of latex barriers like condoms. Parents can include in this discussion their family's beliefs about sexual relationships.

These older children can also learn that HIV is transmitted from mothers with HIV to their babies and is transmitted by contact with contaminated needles. It is important for

women who are pregnant to have an HIV test and it is important to avoid reuse of needles for drug use, tattoos or piercings.

The initial conversation about HIV can occur when your child is very young. This can then continue at each developmental level by adding more information. Whenever the topic is on television, in a song on the radio, or addressed in a movie or book, take the opportunity to discuss it. Answer your child's questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, find it. The Centers for Disease Control operates a 24 hour hotline for questions about dis-

eases, including HIV. The number is 1-800-CDC-INFO.

If your child knows someone with HIV infection, it is even more important to teach the child about HIV. In addition to the above information, your child can learn that is safe to touch, hug, play with and live with someone who has HIV. The virus is only transmitted by contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk. Other than blood during an injury, these are not fluids that we encounter in casual contact with friends. It is safe to play at the house of a person with HIV and it is safe to hug and kiss a person with HIV.

So, talk early and talk often about issues that matter for your child's safety. HIV is one of many issues that children need to understand. By giving our children information, we give them power to make decisions for their safety. Talk about HIV with your preschooler so the child learns not to touch blood. Talk about HIV with your young elementary school child so the child can understand how the virus works in the body. Talk with your older elementary or middle school child about how HIV is transmitted and safer sex practices. Lay the groundwork so your teenager knows how not to get HIV.

Throughout their childhood, take advantage of opportunities to talk about HIV - how it feels to live with a stigmatizing disease, how to protect oneself during sexual contacts as well as how to support individuals living with the disease. Keep the lines of communication open throughout your child's development so your child can bring you their most difficult questions. Even if you don't know all the answers, your child will benefit from having serious conversations with you and searching for answers together.

- Contribution by Dara Garner-Edwards, MSW, LCSW;

Social Worker, Department of Care Coordination; Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center. WFUBMC's Pediatric Infectious Diseases Team is a member of the North Carolina Children's AIDS Network of providers caring for children with HIV across the state.

For further information, questions or comments about this article, call toll-free 1-877-530-1824. Or, for more information about the Maya Angelou Research Center on Minority Health, visit www.wfubmc.edu/minority-health.

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