

## Cleveland County Takes the Step ONE Challenge

Residents of Cleveland County stepped up this spring to take the Step ONE Challenge, a walking contest designed to energize individuals and get them to increase their physical activity. Overweight and obesity are documented problems in Cleveland County and contribute to the county's levels of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and asthma. The Alliance for Health in Cleveland County, Inc., the county's Healthy Carolinians partnership, joined forces with the Fit Together Initiative of the Cleveland County Health Department and the Spirit of Women program at Cleveland Regional Medical Center to challenge residents to a nine-week, team-based walking contest.

The rules were simple. Teams of from three to six individuals were encouraged to register for the contest, choosing their own names and selecting a captain who would be the contact person for the team. Residents 12 and over were encouraged to form teams. Each team member received a step-counter pedometer and a walking log for the nine-week contest. The walking logs also included conversion charts to allow individuals who were physically active to convert their activities to steps. The initial announcement of the contest came at a quarterly meeting of the Alliance for Health and prospective participants had two weeks to register their teams. The local newspaper featured the contest in several articles and placed information about teams, including challenges among the teams, on its website. Funding for the pedometers was provided by the Fit Together Initiative funded by the N. C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission and by Cleveland Regional Medical Center.

1,737 individuals on 347 teams began the contest on April 30, 2006 and pledged to walk through June 30, 2006. There were a few missteps along the way; participants learned that the pedometers were not waterproof and that pedometers didn't bounce too well on hard surfaces.

Organizers learned the hard way that telephone numbers on the registration forms were really helpful! Team members encouraged each other, often offering a challenge to individuals, and providing encouragement when the temperatures rose outside in June! One agency had fourteen teams organized among its employees with those participants spurred onward by an agency monetary prize.

When the contest closed in June and the steps were counted, 182 teams actually turned in their walking logs. Of those 182 teams, 98 had complete information according to the rules; 84 teams provided incomplete information (lack of names, missing data, incomplete team information) and so their steps were not counted in the final tally. The 98 teams walked a total of **62,445,230** steps! That is the equivalent of walking the earth's circumference at the equator (**24,901.55 miles or 49,803,100 steps**) plus walking from Shelby, NC to California and back (**5102.68 miles or 10,205,360 steps**) plus walking from Shelby, NC to New York City and halfway back (**1010.33 miles or 2,020,650 steps**) plus a few extra steps!

The top three teams won a variety of prizes: t-shirts, water bottles, medallions and a high quality pedometer. The first place team consisting of five individuals averaged 1,555,106 steps and also won dinner at a nice local restaurant plus having their names engraved on a traveling trophy donated by First National Bank, our hometown bank.

Participants walked for a variety of reasons – a challenge from a friend, as a church activity, for person reasons like losing weight. One participant began the contest with a goal to lose weight and succeeded. She said that walking worked so well for her that her co-workers began asking what she was doing to lose the weight. She also involved her young grandchildren and bought them their own pedometers so that they could walk with her!

The bottom line – this contest was fun, built upon teamwork to get people up and moving, taught individuals that increasing physical activity didn't require elaborate equipment or a high dollar investment, and provided some interesting opportunities for challenging friends, neighbors, co-workers, church members, and youth groups to get out and walk. Plans are underway to repeat this contest again next spring, using the logo and building upon our successes and aiming to involve 3000 individuals the next time!

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