



Health Matters

Celebrating King County
Health Heroes

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Supporting the King County Health Reform Initiative

AUGUST 2008

Dear Friend,

On any given day, more than 13,000 King County employees can be found working in hundreds of worksites, ranging from seaside to forest stream, from downtown office to maintenance facility, from patrol car to Metro bus. King County is a place of extraordinary diversity in the types of workplaces where we spend so much of our lives.

Since its inception in 2004, King County's Health Reform Initiative has been based on the idea that empowering employees to play a greater role in their own well-being is the key to making better health care choices — choices that ultimately control cost.

In King County, some of these employees are called Health Heroes. They come from every corner of the county and all the workplaces in between. What their successes all have in common is:

- A vision of health they hold onto for motivation
- Pursuing a passion for a healthy activity
- A supportive environment in the workplace

On the following pages, you'll find a small sampling of their stories. You can find many more of your co-workers online. Go in-depth and watch their videos at www.kingcounty.gov/employees/healthheroes.

We hope you'll find these personal stories of triumph an inspiration.

All the Best,

Health Matters Team



This workplace has been recognized by the American Heart Association for meeting criteria for employee fitness.



Mary Roberts

Superior Court, Norm Maleng RJC

Superior Court Judge Mary Roberts has always run a high-performance courtroom and now she and her colleagues have joined together to be a high-performance athletic team — the “Ultimate Fitness Court,” to be exact, one of the winning teams from last year’s Live Well Challenge.

“We’re all very competitive people,” she said. “When we saw an opportunity to compete and win prizes — and show up our co-workers — we took it.”

Mary, her bailiff and two clerks all had different health issues and came together to inspire each other.

For Mary, the personal motivation is aging. “I am going to turn 50 this year and I have hit that place where I am afraid if I don’t get it together now, I’ll never get it together.”

Working with her younger bailiff and clerks helped motivate her. These 20- and 30-somethings didn’t want to be outperformed by someone nearing her 50s.

Mary started eating better and exercising more as part of her Live Well Challenge team, which continued to gain traction after the contest ended. Mary ran a half marathon, her bailiff did the Seattle-to-Portland bike race, one of her clerks took on the Danskin Triathlon, while the other entered the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

“I never ran a step until I was 45 and last fall I ran a half marathon. I didn’t believe I could run a mile and I ran over 13 miles and this year I am training for a full marathon.”

Mary used her position as a supervisor to adjust the schedule to accommodate her staff’s exercise routines. She also relaxed typical court standards in the name of efficiency and stress relief. “I don’t mind if my staff has wet hair after lunch (after they exercise). We got a couple of comments about the wet hair, but when we told people it was because we ran up Capitol Hill, we didn’t hear any more flak about it.”

For Mary, her colleagues have been key to her success. “It’s not like I am the leader. We all encourage each other.”



“It’s not like I am the leader. We all encourage each other.”

Mary Roberts

Ron Sims

King County Executive

In his mind’s eye, he was still the fit athlete he had been in younger days. In reality, according to his Wellness Assessment, he was obese and at risk for type 2 diabetes. On January 3, 2006, the third day of the Healthy IncentivesSM Program, King County Executive Ron Sims confronted his health status and began to make changes. In the coming year he would lose 49 pounds, lower his blood pressure and cholesterol and ride his bicycle from Seattle, WA to Portland, OR.

His journey to improved health was both professional and personal. Professionally, he knew he couldn’t ask King County employees to do something he wasn’t willing to do himself. Personally, it meant facing the reality of his future health and the difficult process of change.

Sims had watched his father die of complications from type 2 diabetes and sees the effect of the disease on his mother, still living in the Seattle area. “I had a choice to make. Either head in a different direction, or be like my parents in terms of my health,” he said.

Like other health heroes in King County, for Sims the key has been finding an activity he is passionate about — biking. He also holds onto a vision of a healthy retirement with his wife. That makes passing up the maple bars a little easier.

Sims will tell you there’s no silver bullet for changing your habits and improving your health. It comes down to hard work and discipline.

Jessica Cline

Sheriff's Office Deputy, Norm Maleng RJC

After years of seesaw dieting, Jessica Cline, a detective with the Sheriff's Office in Kent, stopped "waiting for Monday" to start improving her health and instead began "living for today." The wake-up call came when she rushed her daughter to the hospital with abdominal pain. The diagnosis was a kidney infection.

"What was happening in her body was not healthy," says Jessica, who knew it was time to start helping her daughter develop life-long healthy habits. She knew it started with her.

Three days later, Jessica received a global e-mail about the county's Weight Watchers at



Work® program. Weight Watchers had the structure and the content to help Jessica learn how to eat smart and move more. The sense of camaraderie with her colleagues in the same program was important to Jessica.

"We're all on the same path with the same goal," she says.

But change is never easy and when Jessica's enthusiasm flagged in the midst of her weight-loss journey, she again turned to family for inspiration. "I started thinking that I had extra time with my father (at the end of his life) because he took care of himself. I had all of those extra memories."

"We're all on the same path with the same goal."

Jessica Cline

So Jessica rededicated herself to a healthy lifestyle. "I am 68 pounds lighter. But, I am not doing this for a dress size or a reunion. It was something I had to change and never look back. I want to be fit for duty. I don't want to just be average, I want to be better than that."

Jessica has not only changed what she eats, but how she relates to food. "I look at food as a way to fuel my body for my next workout. Not for comfort or to escape."

Of her ongoing commitment to staying healthy, Jessica says, "I can't predict what will happen in five years, but I can say if I am healthy now I will be better longer. If not for me, then for my family."



"I had a choice to make. Either head in a different direction, or be like my parents in terms of my health."

Ron Sims

"I have a busy job," said Sims. "I have a lot of demands on my time. But my doctor gave me the best advice. He said you have to make a decision about if your personal health is worth the time you would spend in a meeting." That prompted Sims to find one hour a day to move toward better health.

The hard work has been worth it. He has found a new passion in biking and the dream of a healthy retirement with his wife is closer to reality.

Steve Witkowski and Jim Pitts

DNRP, Wastewater Treatment, Renton

Jim Pitts and Steve Witkowski work together at the South Point Wastewater Treatment plant. Jim nominated Steve to be a King County Health Hero after Steve's health improvements inspired Jim to make improvements of his own.

When Jim returned to the Treatment Plant after working offsite, he noticed Steve's "different stature." Indeed, during Jim's absence, Steve had lost 53 pounds. He has also lowered his cholesterol from 300 to 163 and his blood pressure from 145/81 to 116/71.

The impetus for Steve to improve his health came after taking the wellness assessment and deciding that he needed to go to his doctor to get a baseline on his health. The exam revealed high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes. Having seen his mother suffer type 1 diabetes, Steve decided to improve his health.

Steve and Jim ended up walking together during King County's Public Health Week walks, and as Jim talked to Steve about his improved health, he realized he had a lot in common with Steve, including a family history of diabetes. Jim was inspired to take similar steps to improve his own health.

For both men, a pedometer has been a key tool for moving more. Both use the pedometers they got during Public Health Week to track their steps and meet their goal of taking at least 10,000 steps daily. Jim makes conscious choices to boost his steps, like parking at the end of the parking lot. On the nights he umpires Little League, he can get as many as 15,000 steps.

Steve's advice to others striving to improve their health is to take small steps. A train commuter, he took small steps throughout the spring to be able to ride his bike all the way home. First he got off one stop before home, then two stops before home until he was able to ride all the way home.

"You need to be able to do it with someone else to keep you going and for inspiration."

Jim Pitts



For Jim, the key was doing it with someone else. "You need to be able to do it with someone else to keep you going and for inspiration."

Laura McCollum Wallace

DDES, Renton

Laura McCollum Wallace is a computer nerd by day, a belly dancer by night and a health hero to her colleagues at DDES. She was named DDES' 2007 Employee of the Year in large part for how her health improvements inspired others.

Laura's "aha" moment came when she saw a picture of herself belly dancing in a parade. At 252 lbs. and with a family history of diabetes, she realized she needed to do something to improve her health. So she turned to something she loved — belly dancing.

Her version of belly dancing is called powerbellies. She dances up to 1½ hours with a 13-pound belt on her hips. She has lost 73 pounds and gone from high risk to low risk. She attributes her success to working with her Healthways coach and the supportive environment at DDES, a place where walkers gather in the lobby every day at noon.

"I hadn't really realized how much I was eating until I started talking to my health coach," Laura says. Her coach helped her make smarter choices about what she ate, portion size and when she ate. "My health coach really made me think and held me accountable."

Daisy Daily

DOT, Renton Roads

Daisy Daily first started thinking about losing weight when she hit her highest weight and started having trouble performing her job with the Renton Roads crew in the Department of Transportation. When she noticed her daughter mimicking her own eating habits, she thought that by being a role model for good health, she could free her daughter from the consequences of “carrying an extra load,” which Daisy had for most of her life.

First, Daisy visited her doctor to discuss her weight loss options so she could steer clear of the ineffective or unhealthy diets out there. Under doctor supervision, Daisy opted for a low-carb diet. “The first thing I did was spoil myself on steak and



“My health coach really made me think and held me accountable.”

Laura McCollum Wallace

Laura’s success has moved her co-workers to improve their health. Walking, hula hooping and weight loss are some of the ways her co-workers have pursued their goals for good health. All have been inspired by Laura’s message to “find something you are passionate about and follow it.”

What they see in Laura is a confidence and spirit that comes from good health. “She is expressing her beauty from inside not just outside.”



seafood,” she laughs. Regular exercise was also an important part of Daisy’s new routine. She started with 20 minutes, five times a week on the treadmill and soon was hiking up Mt. Si. She has lost over 100 pounds.

She credits Healthy IncentivesSM with keeping her on track. The first year she took coaching calls, the second year she did “Colorful Choices” and this year “Get Fit on Route 66,” which is her favorite. “I really liked the e-mail tips,” she said. Daisy also relies on the *Health Matters* newsletter for fresh ideas so her efforts to maintain her good health don’t get stale.

Daisy has also found support at her worksite from colleagues and her supervisor. She and about 30 of her colleagues participated in a “poker walk” during Public Health Week where they walked around a site and stopped to pick up cards along the way. The person with the best hand at the end got a gift certificate to Subway and everyone got a pedometer.

“They’ve given me a lot of praise through this whole process. They’ve been right there beside me the whole time rooting me on, saying, ‘Come on, you can do it.’”

For Daisy, losing weight is about good health and being a positive role model for her daughters. “I don’t think it should matter about your shape or size. It’s about being healthy. I’m a much better role model for my daughters now. My oldest daughter started following in my footsteps and was not making the best choices with her eating habits. Watching me eating better, exercising more and having a healthy lifestyle made her follow that example. We’re a lot more active and healthy family.”

To other county employees striving to improve their health, Daisy says, “You’re worth it. You will live a much better life not being restricted.”

“I’m a much better role model for my daughters now.”

Daisy Daily

Craig Riggs

DCHS, WorkSource, Auburn

In his 14 years as a county employee, Craig Riggs has always been physically fit, engaging in an exercise routine that includes regular workouts, great nutrition and competitive tennis.

But in August of 2007, he suffered a near-fatal heart attack, collapsing on the tennis court after a regular practice.

“I woke up 24 hours later in the hospital, and was informed that I had just had triple bypass surgery, where they discovered three arteries were 90 percent blocked.”

Because of his family health history, Craig knew the attack was always a possibility.

“I had the same heart attack at the same age as my Dad — 59 years and three months.” Craig’s long-standing determination to surpass his father’s longevity may, in fact, have spared him from death. “The doctors told me that the collateral circulation around my heart was probably just enough to save me,” said Craig, who credits his health regimen for giving his heart just enough blood to pull through.

“That and 9-1-1. Thank goodness for King County.”

Despite being the sole King County employee at WorkSource in Auburn, Craig counted on friends, family, co-workers from other agencies in the building and the internet to rebuild his community of wellness. This community includes his wife, Tammy, who is a nurse, his tennis team, and his supervisor in Renton, as well as Healthy IncentivesSM.

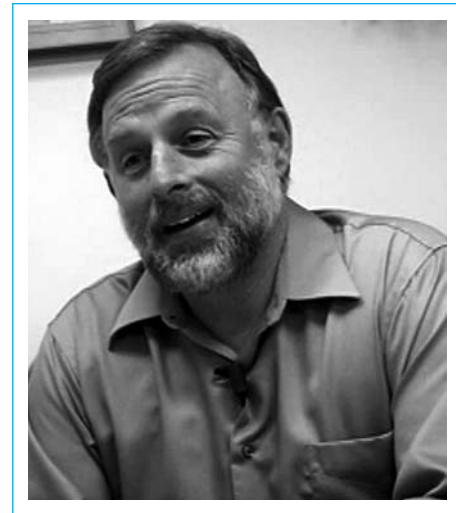
“I did Route 66. It was easy. I’ve always been oriented toward good health. But everyone needs an incentive.”

Back on the job for several months now, Craig has joined the “Bike to Work” program, swims twice a week, walks regularly and, of course, plays competitive tennis.

“My number one goal is to be at 110 percent of my condition a year ago,” says Craig. “I’m almost there.”

“My number one goal is to be at 110 percent of my condition a year ago.”

Craig Riggs



Harold Taniguchi and Laurie Brown

Department of Transportation

Since the Healthy IncentivesSM program began, the Director’s Office at the Department of Transportation has changed from a place where people eat candy bars for breakfast to a place where people share healthy recipes. At the center of this change are the department’s Director and Deputy Director, Harold Taniguchi and Laurie Brown.

Harold liked the idea of being healthy, but was not very motivated to take action to make exercise part of his daily life. He belonged to as many as three gyms around town, but did not go to any.

These days, Harold works out regularly with a personal trainer and watches what he eats. The impetus for this change was a visit to his doctor, where Harold found out he was at risk for diabetes.

His doctor recommended changes to his diet and regular exercise as a way to reverse the trend. The culture of wellness in the county is what gave Harold the support to do just that. Harold also saw the value in modeling healthy behavior as the director of a department. “There is a relationship between people who are healthy in the workplace and how they perform their job,” he said.

It wasn’t long after Harold started talking about how great he felt before Laurie Brown decided to

Dr. Emily Transue

The Polyclinic, Seattle

Dr. Emily Transue is a primary care doctor at the Polyclinic who has seen the Healthy IncentivesSM program motivate many King County employees to take ownership of their health.

“I started having patients walk in the door saying ‘I need to have a healthier lifestyle,’ which was a bit of a shock since most of the time it’s the other way around. I had all of these people coming in saying I need to exercise, I need to quit smoking.”



Dr. Transue credits Healthy IncentivesSM with giving people the motivation to make positive changes to their health. “It’s been a wonderful springboard because usually the position we are in on the medical side is cleaning up after things have gone wrong or saying ‘you need to do this, you need to do that’... What this has become is a real way to get more traction and really get people moving in the right direction.”

Dr. Transue says the work King County has done to create a workplace supportive of healthy habits helps remove barriers to good health and gives people positive role models for inspiration. Health promotion activities like the Live Well Challenge and the Public Health Week walks can keep people motivated.

“So many people have an unhealthy culture at work. But that’s where behavior is really happening. You don’t come into the doctor’s office once a year and determine your behaviors based on that half hour.”

To reinforce the importance of workplace culture in encouraging healthy habits, Dr. Transue points to recent studies that show how much people’s friends and colleagues impact their behavior. The studies, which have appeared in medical literature, show that people tend to quit smoking in clusters. Other studies show that when one person in a group of friends or colleagues loses weight, it is more likely the others will, too.

“What makes (Healthy IncentivesSM) so important is that you are tackling behavior where it happens.”

“I started having patients walk in the door saying ‘I need to have a healthier lifestyle,’ which was a bit of a shock since most of the time it’s the other way around.”

Dr. Emily Transue



“There is a relationship between people who are healthy in the workplace and how they perform their job.”

Harold Taniguchi

set her own goals. She started the South Beach diet with her husband and, “not to be outdone by Harold, I started working out,” she laughs.

Harold and Laurie agree that a key for both of them was taking ownership of their own health.

“You have to make the decision for yourself,” says Harold. “It didn’t help me much to just have the gym membership. Once I made the decision to make a difference that was what worked.”

Laurie echoes this sentiment. “For me it works when it becomes something I own and not for financial incentives. I think it happened because of the environment.”

Celebrate Farmers Market Week!

King County Executive Ron Sims joins Governor Christine Gregoire in proclaiming August 12–19 as “Farmers Market Week.”

King County has nearly 60,000 acres of farmlands that contribute products sold at local farmers markets. Employees and their families are encouraged to show their support by shopping at local farmers markets during this week. Many markets will celebrate with special events such as cooking demonstrations and live music.

For a list of farmers markets and farms in King County, including U-pick farms and farms that sell organic products, visit www.puget_soundfresh.org or call 206-632-0606.

Earn Points for Becoming a Health Hero!

Remember that you can earn Live Well Challenge points for submitting your story. Go to: www.metrokc.gov/employees/livewellchallenge.



Healthy Incentives Program Appeals

If you earned a lower color (gold, silver, bronze) than anticipated for your out-of-pocket expense level in 2009, you have the option to appeal. The period for submitting an appeal to Healthways is **August 1–31, 2008**.

- You must first contact Healthways to appeal your color — do not contact King County. Healthways can be reached toll-free at 1-877-279-0624.
- Appeal decision letters will be sent to your mailing address by mid-September.
- In October, you will be able to go online to review your current benefits and your family color for 2009 medical benefits.



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