

Program keeps county office staff on their feet

By **DAVID HEDGES**

Publisher - Folks at the Roane County Schools central office are really watching their step these days.

They're keeping track of every one of them.

Wearing pedometers to count the number of steps they take, central office employees are walking the walk by participating in a wellness program sponsored by the W.Va. Public Employees Insurance Agency.

Staff members from the custodian to the superintendent are taking part in the "Stepping Stones" program designed to promote fitness through walking.

Each employee, and their spouses covered by PEIA, was issued a pedometer to keep track of how many steps they take each day.

Halfway through the 10-week program, it seems to be working.

"I've never seen so many people walking," Cathy Linkinogger, the superintendent's secretary and captain of one of two teams called the "Walkineers," said.

"You look out the window at lunch and you see everyone walking around the block," Linkinogger said. "I don't think I've ever walked to town for lunch before, but I have now."

"We've had a lot of fun with this program," Mary Ann Wilson, food service coordinator and coordinator of the wellness program along with a related program to encourage participants to drink plenty of water, said.

Wilson is a member of the Walkineers, but her husband, transportation director Woody Wilson, is walking for the opposition, appropriately named the "Sneakers."

The goal for each participant is to take 10,000 steps a day, which Wilson said is around five miles.

Awards are given weekly for most steps and most improved and even the most enthusiastic.

Custodian Joyce Evans holds the record with 42,000 steps in a day. After a busy day at work, she went home and got on the treadmill to hit that mark, Wilson said.

Although no one else has reached that mark, they are still watching their steps.

“I walk to lunch every day, even in the rain,” Roger Miller, director of student services, said.

“And no one ever picks me up,” he added, casting a grin at his co-workers.

Facilities director Mike Offutt said he has been averaging 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day.

“On weekends I can get 12,000 or 14,000 steps in,” he said. “I ride my bicycle too. The pedometer doesn’t count that, but the whole object is to keep moving.”

Superintendent Steve Goffreda and his oldest son, on spring break from college, drove to New Jersey last week to visit his parents.

Even while driving, Goffreda took the necessary steps so he wouldn’t put his team behind.

“Every rest area where it was convenient, we got out and walked,” he said. “And I’m not talking just right around the rest area. We went where only the dogs walk.”

Once they finished the 500-mile drive to New Jersey, Goffreda still needed more steps. So when he and his parents went to an ice cream shop, he kept going.

“While my father was ordering the ice cream, my 79-year-old mother and I did laps around the parking lot,” he said. “My father said he’d never seen her move so fast.”

Asst. Supt. David Kinison, who has an artificial knee, only logged 417 steps his first day. Now when he has a break he walks around the block, which he has measured at 634 steps.

“One day last week I broke 3,200 (steps),” he said proudly. For that he received the most improved award for the week.

Wilson said the pedometer makes it easy to keep track of your steps, and everyone is keeping a close eye. When co-workers pass each other in the hallway it’s not uncommon to stop long enough to check each other’s mileage.

“The first thing you do when you run into somebody is see who has the most steps,” Linkinogger said.

And the competition is getting keen, especially among opposing team members in the same household.

“You put that pedometer on as soon as you get out of bed in the morning,” said Wilson, who is proud of the fact that she beats her husband on most days.

“There’s been a few times he’s beaten me,” she said. “But I’m glad we’re on opposite teams.”

Wilson said several people say they plan to keep wearing their pedometer when the program ends in a few weeks. That’s one of the incentives provided by PEIA for participants, along with the chance to win prizes such as exercise equipment and hunting or fishing licenses.

With pride and prizes on the line, everybody is getting up from behind their desk whenever they can.

“You’re not going to miss a chance to get a few steps,” Linkinogger, who said the program has changed a lot of things at the county office, noted.

“Now we don’t call and ask anyone to bring us anything,” she said. “We go get it ourselves.”

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