



Program puts sole into fitness

BY PEG McNICHOL

Ken Riebe, 80, and his wife, Elaine, 78, of Freedom Village in Holland, cross Eighth Street at Central Avenue while walking in downtown Holland. Peggy and John Deltaan of Holland walk along 12th Street in Holland. The street is a designated route in the Golden Shoe Campaign.

RELATED STORIES

Five weeks into the Ottawa County Wellness Coalition's Golden Shoe campaign, it's debatable whether the program is accomplishing its goals. The group wants residents to get fit and volunteer to push health programs at school and work.

"Our overall goal is to grow awareness of our coalition," said Becky Young, Wellness Coalition member and the county's health promotion team supervisor. "The side goal is to provide a fun way for people to exercise."

The coalition is promoting walking, touted by the National Institutes of Health for being free exercise with a host of benefits, including weight control. A 2001 study by Michigan's Department of Community Health indicates more than 60 percent of the state's residents are overweight; 25 percent are obese.

Every other week, county workers hide a shoe, spray-painted gold, along designated routes in each city. Walkers who retrieve a gold shoe win a footwear gift certificate.

Since the April 20 kickoff, which drew 68 in Holland, 162 Zeeland and 88 in Grand Haven, only five residents have joined the coalition, Young said. The county has no baseline number of walkers for comparing to the campaign's numbers.

"In the first year of a program, unfortunately, by nature it's almost always successful because it didn't already exist before," said Adrienne Schumacher, Holland's recreation and special events coordinator. She's also a coalition member.

"We can't make someone be a walker," she said. "But we can increase the chance they would have a good experience engaging in that behavior."

Ken and Elaine Riebe walk together every day. But the Holland couple hasn't followed any Ottawa County Golden Shoe Campaign routes. "We've read about it," said Elaine Riebe, 78, "but we haven't bothered to look for the shoe."

The Golden Shoe Campaign was independently funded by \$20,000 in private donations. The Community Foundation of the Holland-Zeeland Area added \$5,000 to translate materials to Spanish. Some of the cash paid for advertising, brochures, shoes and spray paint; some money is reserved for tracking the campaign's effectiveness. The county is using a random drawing for gift baskets to lure walkers into submitting entry forms that double as evaluation surveys. On May 15, walkers' entries totaled 106 from Zeeland, 197 from Holland, and 304 from Grand Haven. Some may be multiple entries from a few people, according to Ottawa County Health Department spokeswoman Shannon Felgner.

Forms and route maps are at Herrick District Library, Loutit District Library, Howard Miller Library and online at www.gethealthyottawa.org

Jan Swart, a Herrick library assistant, said she sees "steady traffic" to Herrick's Golden Shoe brochure table during her 90-minute shifts at the information desk. Genevieve Warner, 81, has found two golden shoes. The Zeeland woman walks daily. She decided to adopt the county's route, though it is three-quarters of a mile from her home. She said she wasn't even looking for the second shoe. "I just saw it at the bottom of a bush," she said. "The prize is very much worthwhile ... but I wouldn't go looking for it again."

The county now limits winners to one per household, Young said. Evaluations by walkers will be analyzed when the campaign ends on Oct. 19.

Who should walk?

Even 10 minutes of daily exercise can boost your health, says Gayle Kuipers, a Holland Hospital health educator who teaches yoga and aerobic fitness at Hope College.

A Journal of the American Medical Association story this month suggests benefits of moderate exercise begin just three days into a program. (The study also notes one in five U.S. adults who report no physical activity at all claim there's no time to exercise.)

People with health restrictions or inflammation of the knee, hip or other joints may be better off pursuing fitness by swimming or biking, Kuipers says.

Golden rules for walking

The Golden Shoe campaign offers some tips for walking:

- * Get off the couch. See your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- * Find a partner for support.
- * Use the right equipment. A well-fitting pair of running shoes, sunscreen, a bottle of water.
- * Set a realistic goal. A daily walk around the block qualifies.
- * Add distance slowly.
- * Allow yourself to rest. Take a day off if you feel sore.