

A journey to health and happiness

Moving Grays Harbor
By Maryann Welch

Every once in a while someone shares a story of personal achievement that inspires me so much that I have to write about it. About a month ago a former business associate shared such a story . and I was so proud of her accomplishment that I had to document her journey as I know what a struggle achieving health can be. But every achievement starts with that first step.

Debbie Holmberg is a 53 year-old life-long Grays Harbor resident that found herself in that all too familiar trap of a life derailed. In her early 20s she enjoyed hiking frequently and had miles of trails to explore as she lived in the Lake Quinault area. But as my kids got older and were involved in more activities, my priorities changed,+Debbie explained. What I once treasured was put on the back burner. We moved away from Lake Quinault and I got much busier with work. All those extra things in life added up over time and so did the pounds and that contributed to the cycle of depression I found myself in.+

Working in the mental health field and knowing the connection between physical and mental health was not enough to enable me to make a significant change in my own life. My inspiration came in the form of this column and by observing your example. You truly inspire me and I vividly remember you stopping by my office on one of your routine lunch-time walks. You looked so vibrant and happy and I remember thinking that I wanted to feel that way. In fact, you and another former Health Department Employee,

Debbie Cool, were always encouraging me to eat healthier and start exercising . advice I wish I would have heeded sooner.+

My journey toward health started in July of 2007. It was then that I made a concerted effort to change my diet. I stumbled onto a website (www.sparkpeople.com) that gave me great guidance. I started substituting foods and eating more fruits and vegetables - not denying myself anything, but watching portion sizes and limiting my red meat intake. I attempted to walk, but after 10 minutes my chest felt like it was going to explode. It was that way for months. In October I started walking on a treadmill and even though it was hard, I made myself keep going. In May of 2008, with the weather getting nicer, I started to park further away from my destinations as a way to get more activity in my day,+Debbie shares.

What really kicked my quest into high gear was when I read the *Moving Grays Harbor* column in July, 2008 about all the trails in Grays Harbor County. The flip switched for me that day and that very weekend I went to Lake Quinault and hiked for 3 ½ miles! This was the farthest I had walked in 20 years and it felt great. Since that day I have hiked every weekend for at least 5 miles and most recently went 8 miles. I am proud to say that I have not missed one single weekend since July.+

Debbie tells me her favorite places to hike are Lake Quinault and Lake Sylvia (also a favorite of mine). She has purchased rain gear for all kinds of rainy weather and is faithful at walking every morning. She even borrows her boss's dogs and takes them out with her . a great inspiration and a bonus for the dogs as well. Another motivation that Debbie uses is a pedometer. She indicates that she has one that she can stick in her pocket or wear on a lanyard around her neck (Omron HJ112) as she tends to lose the

kind that clip on the waist band. She keeps track of her miles every month and sets personal goals. In fact, her goal this month is to see how long it will take her to accumulate enough miles to walk to her son's house in Kenai, Alaska.

Debbie has lost 107 pounds to date and is still looking to lose about 40 more . a significant accomplishment.

The biggest change I feel from Debbie is her zest for life. I ride my bike to do errands a couple times a week; I don't stay in bed until 11am or waste time on the computer every night. I am always looking for something to do. I feel like I have wasted a lot of my life over the last few years and now I am ready to live it again.+

What an inspiration. This just proves that you have the power to live the life you want to live . you just have to make the investment and the rewards will follow. Happy trails, Debbie!

Maryann Welch is the recently retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.