

# Your journey toward health may be just one good friend away

## *Moving Grays Harbor*

By Maryann Welch

A few months ago this column focused on ways that each individual Harborite, one by one, can make healthier choices that will benefit them personally as well as contribute to the health improvement of the entire community. I have recently become acquainted with a young woman who is on this precise journey not only for herself but to inspire others to challenge themselves to make positive health changes.

Tena Nickle, a life-long Harbor resident, has lost 74 pounds since January. Congratulations Tena! She went from a quality of life that “sucked”, according to her, to a life that she now calls “awesome!” No gimmicks or fancy diet plans for Tena, just healthy eating and a dedication to being physically active.

Tena’s demographics would be familiar to many readers: 41; married for 23 years; three children; and working full-time. Over the years she has gained weight and lost weight in typical yo-yo fashion. However, in the past couple of years her weight escalated to the point that she feared she would not be able to continue in the active job she holds.

The demands of her work - spending all day on her feet, frequent stair climbing, bending and lifting - were becoming more and more uncomfortable and even painful at times. Tena reports that she was depressed and she had no energy. In

addition to that, she was taking cholesterol medication and was diagnosed as borderline diabetic. At one time, feeling very hopeless, she believed that the only way she could take off weight was to have weight reduction surgery.

A phone call from a friend, Cindy Wakefield, in late January, was the turning point for Tena. Cindy encouraged Tena to get walking and change her eating habits by telling her, “you’re a go-getter, you can do this!” She calls it her “celery and walking” turn-around call.

The next morning Cindy called again. This time to ask her what she planned to eat that day...then she phoned the following day and told Tena they would meet in the afternoon for a walk. This positive push spurred Tena to make dietary changes immediately and she also resolved to walk regularly.

Inviting others to walk initiated a loose knit weight loss support group dubbed “Pants on the Ground”. At one point there have been over twenty women meeting up to walk, most frequently at the track in Hoquiam. Tena reports that she was barely able to make it around the track at first; however, on a recent day she logged 7 miles between her morning and afternoon walks! Tena has now left behind six sizes of pants, has no need for cholesterol medication, has normal blood pressure, and feet and knees that don’t ache!

One of the biggest factors in Tena’s success, she shared, is the support of her “Pants on the Ground Crew”. The group uses the social networking site, Facebook, to enhance their communication. Plans for where and when to meet for walks are posted and individual walking activity is shared as well. Sharing accomplishments, like “before and after pictures”, and receiving accolades from friends on Facebook has proved to be a major motivator for Tena.

When I joined the group recently for a walk that circled the track and then headed up the hill behind Hoquiam High at a vigorous pace, it was apparent that these up-beat, positive ladies were out to improve their health one walk at a time. With the goal of other 40-plus pounds to lose, Tena can hardly wait to join the crew each day to walk her way toward even better health.

Tena is a great example of how one person can make a positive change in her own life through the inspiration of others and pay it forward by inspiring and encouraging others. The resulting ripple effect can end up changing a community one person at a time. If you'd like to see how walking can improve your life, you are welcome to join the "Pants on the Ground Crew" at the Hoquiam track most weekdays at 5pm. You'll find the group by searching for "POTG Crew" on Facebook.

If you can't get to Hoquiam to join this group...start your own. As you have just read, your journey toward a healthier life may be just one phone call away.

*Maryann Welch is a life-long harborite, the retired director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department, and an avid exercise enthusiast.*

*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](mailto:moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us) or visit our web site at [www.healthygh.org](http://www.healthygh.org).*