

Auburn Hills' 100 Days to Health Challenge encourages lasting lifestyle change



Participants in the 100 Days to Health Challenge socialized during a walk in downtown Auburn Hills, Michigan

This wellness program provides 100 days of activities to keep older adults 'informed, educated, socialized and as active as possible'

This is the seventh article in a series of eight profiling the recipients of the 2008 ICAA Innovators Awards. Presented by the International Council on Active Aging®, these awards honor excellence and creativity in the health and wellness field, and recognize organizations that have created cutting-edge offerings for active aging. In 2005, the awards program expanded to include the Equipment Innovator category. ICAA is an association that supports professionals who develop wellness and fitness facilities and services for adults 50 and over.

In the Detroit suburb of Auburn Hills, Michigan, famous American names such as Chrysler, Pontiac and Dodge are part

of the region's rich history. But the fast-growing city of more than 20,000 also looks to a promising future.

Auburn Hills is home today to more than 60 international corporations, including the world headquarters of Chrysler Group LLC. The city also boasts Great Lakes Crossing, a 1.4-million-sq.-ft. mall; the Walter P. Chrysler Museum ("more than 70 antique, custom and concept vehicles"); and The Palace of Auburn Hills, host to the National Basketball Association's Detroit Pistons. In addition, there are neighborhood amenities such as parks and trails—some along the banks of the Clinton River—plus recreational facilities.

Built in 2003, the busy, full-service Community Center "promotes healthy, active lifestyles for all, and provides a place for a host of programs and services for the Auburn Hills community," according to the city's official website.

Offerings for adults ages 55 and older are provided by the City of Auburn Hills Senior Services.

The department, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, “has grown from the back room of a very small library to [this] beautiful facility,” beams Shelly Chapman, Senior Services’ event coordinator. “Our mission here,” she explains, “is to provide quality services, preparing our seniors for the future and meeting the needs of the present.” Senior Services offers “many services and outreach programs, from health and wellness to arts and culture as well as daily living requirements such as transportation and Meals on Wheels.”

In 2007, Senior Services developed the 100 Days to Health Challenge, a wellness program designed to encourage lasting lifestyle change and improve quality of life. This program has run for three successive summers, and aims to help Auburn Hills’ older-adult community stay “informed, educated, socialized and as active as possible at their level of fitness,” Chapman states. With participation increasing every year and many past participants returning, “we feel our program is making a great impact on all the people involved, and plan to repeat the program every summer,” she says.

To find out more, the *Journal on Active Aging*[®] recently asked Chapman to describe Auburn Hills’ 100 Days to Health Challenge, what it involves and why it matters.

JAA: *Please tell us more about the 100 Days to Health Challenge and what it entails for participants.*

SC: Older adults involved in the 100 Days program register for a minimal fee, beginning in the week of National Senior Health and Fitness Day in May. Participants collect a schedule and a folder of additional information to log progress during the program. Also distributed are journals and pamphlets from sponsors and planned speakers.

Everyone is encouraged to attend as many programs, events and activities as possible. We offer the best of our pro-

grams incorporating social elements, fitness and education, and involve area businesses to generate a sense of community. By attending and being active in the 100-day period, all seniors have an opportunity to collect wooden nickels. These tokens are made especially for this program. Participants can later exchange these tokens for raffle tickets, giving them the chance to win prizes from sponsors and speakers.

Developing goals before and during the 100 days has become common among the participants, as have support groups and new friendships. Several groups have formed lasting support and fitness habits.

At the conclusion of the 100 days, we have a barbeque, where we present awards to participants as well as recognize the sponsors and staff for their support. We also encourage everyone to continue their good habits and make healthy lifestyle changes.

JAA: *Where did the idea come from for the 100 Days to Health Challenge? And what was the driving force behind the development of this initiative?*

SC: At a conference I attended for the Michigan Parks and Recreation Association, a center from Canton, Ohio, did a presentation about 100 days for families to spend time together during the summer. Participants in this program attended only a few community events, however, and families were left to plan most of their time together. I felt we could redesign this program to meet the needs of an older audience. Seniors need social circles and support, as well as a purpose, a place, and an opportunity to be useful; they have so much to offer.

The people I encounter every day teach and encourage me. I wanted to do the same in return by offering them new information, by educating them on the alternatives available and, most important, by encouraging them to live their lives to the fullest every day and have fun, motivating experiences.

JAA: *What is involved in providing the 100 Days to Health Challenge each year?*

Five key steps involved in offering a successful 100 days program

1. Listen to the needs of older adults and apply as much as possible to the program.
2. Be dedicated to the program to ensure its success. Be present at each event or activity; if you can't, send a representative or sponsor. It is very important to the seniors.
3. Be prepared. Not all events will succeed on a grand scale. Don't have expectations and learn from your failures.
4. Gain innovative ideas through networking, sponsorships, research and planning.
5. Think differently—in the box, out of the box, no box, make the box fit the need. Use your imagination. Help people live life to the fullest.

SC: The development of the program requires a little imagination, a lot of preparation time and some generous sponsors. I first work on ideas and events that spark interest in the seniors, then generate the schedule for the program (e.g., events, speakers, business tours). Some events are repeated from past years and some are changed based on suggestions and ideas. I call a lot of people to develop a few key events. We also hold a meeting for area businesses, where they are invited to learn about the program and become a sponsor by providing a donation, service demonstration, or the like. We put all this information together, advertise it in our newsletter and take registrations.

JAA: *How would you describe the response of age 55-plus adults to the program in the three years since its launch?*

SC: Our seniors have come to love and look forward to the program. The

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Golfing lessons helped individuals improve their play during the 100 Days to Health Challenge in Auburn Hills, Michigan

response to the events and activities has been positive from the beginning, and participation has grown every year. We had 14 registrants in year one, 49 registrants in year two, and 57 registrants in year three (2009)—11 of whom were new participants. The seniors are great advocates for the program. Their word-of-mouth speaks volumes and encourages others to join.

JAA: *What is the impact of the 100 days timeline? Is it a motivating factor for participants?*

SC: The 100 day timeline was designed to create lasting lifestyle changes, in the hope that after 100 days, people would feel encouraged to continue these changes. We have recorded a clear increase in participation in fitness classes and other events scheduled during the program. In addition, because of the interest generated through demos and classes offered, we have developed new classes such as kickboxing, bocce ball and golf. Attendance has also risen in chair exercise and Golden Beats (a class featuring low-impact movement while playing rhythms on a ball).

JAA: *How have you reached out and encouraged people to participate? Do*

you offer incentives to take the challenge, for example? Enlist the help of past participants?

SC: We've reached out through advertising in newsletters, banners and flyers, and by having past participants attend the sponsorship meeting—word of mouth is very powerful. In addition, we have T-shirts every year and list sponsors on the back. We also network and advertise through our sponsors.

For participants, our “wooden nickel” tokens are a powerful incentive. Older adults were always told when they were younger, “Don't take any wooden nickels.” Well, these wooden nickels are a fun twist on our program. The more nickels participants collect, the better their chances are of winning prizes such as free health screenings, hotel stays, food certificates, \$100 savings bonds, golf lessons, and fire extinguishers.

JAA: *How important to participation is the opportunity to learn something new? And how do you ensure your programming offers new and varied experiences for participants?*

SC: Lifestyles have changed tremendously over the last 50 years. We try to make

the transition a little easier for older adults. Many participants have thanked us for providing information and instruction from speakers that improved their quality of life, from things such as how to lower blood pressure to financial assistance. Finding the right experience can be hit or miss, though. It all depends on the individual need. I do a lot of research before the program, checking out the validity of businesses and finding innovative information. It's important to protect the seniors when soliciting businesses are involved.

JAA: *What would you say are your most popular offerings so far?*

SC: Some of the most popular programs are:

- cooking classes
- tours of area businesses
- relaxation station
- walking clubs
- golf lessons

JAA: *Have you identified any common challenges to participation among different age groups (e.g., Boomers, older adults)? And if so, how did you address them?*

SC: Activities are included to cover every level of fitness, from more active younger seniors to less active older adults. Participants can choose to attend any or none of the events during the 100 days. But I believe that the biggest challenges our seniors face are depression issues, affordable places to attend fitness classes, and fear of the new.

JAA: *What are some of the outcomes of participation?*

SC: In 2008, participants reported a variety of outcomes. They lowered blood pressure, lost weight (especially those in the walking club), learned to deal with depression and felt better overall, made

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new friends, and found better ways to cook healthy food. Several support groups also formed and continued to work out.

We collected information this year from 20 people (our Diamond Club). These participants documented everything they did for the 100 Days program—from blood pressure, cholesterol, classes and house chores to social activities—filling out logs and journals, which they returned to me each week. I have documented all their activities and am doing an official outcomes report.

JAA: *What long-term goals did you establish for the 100 Days to Health Challenge? And how do you view the results to date?*

SC: Our long-term goals are to meet the needs of many, to help people find ways to become more active, to help improve mental health, to meet the Boomers' needs, and to promote a healthier approach to life. We also want to make sure the program does not become boring or repetitive (a big challenge).

To evaluate results, we reach out and listen to participants and do surveys for each event. I consider the results to date very positive just from the increase in attendance. In addition, participants will sometimes come to me after an activity and say that we should do more of these classes or they'll ask for a speaker to come back. It's a win for everyone.

JAA: *Do you see the program evolving in the years to come to encompass new goals or directions?*

SC: It's very important to keep the program fresh, so our seniors look forward to the coming year. So we listen, learn and change. Bottom line, if the program *does not evolve* with the participants, it will end. ☺

The Journal on Active Aging thanks Shelly Chapman of the City of Auburn Hills Senior Services for her help with this article. For more information about Senior Services, visit www.auburnhills.org, then click on "Departments" and select "Senior Services" from the drop down menu.

Images courtesy of the City of Auburn Hills Senior Services

Introducing the FAME Project



The International Council on Active Aging and the National Fibromyalgia Association have collaborated to provide a FREE online training program for fitness and health professionals on how to most effectively work with people who have fibromyalgia.

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FAME *Fibromyalgia Assessment, Management & Education*

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