Fitness Backstory

“If you’re not healthy...you’re not happy.” With this simple but powerful mantra, Linda Fondren has been changing lives in Vicksburg, Mississippi. It’s never easy to lose weight, but with the right motivation it is possible. In her hometown of 24,000 people, Linda has made it her mission to help her community get fit and healthy.

Inspired by her own sister’s untimely death due to complications related to obesity and diabetes, Linda knew she had to do something to help future generations lose weight and live a healthier lifestyle.

She took the first step by becoming a certified personal trainer and opened her own gym called Shape Up Sisters, which offers a free day each Saturday. Even with the gym’s success, Linda wanted to do more. So in the fall of 2009, she asked the mayor, other city officials, and even local restaurants to make health a top priority—and then challenged the people of Vicksburg to lose a total of 17,000 pounds in 17 weeks.

More than 2,500 people participated in Linda’s Shape Up Vicksburg initiative. “I turned a weight-loss challenge into a life-transformation challenge,” says Linda. “It’s not so much about tracking the pounds; it’s about prompting the action, getting people to move, getting communities to move so that we are all helping each other. Because if we’re not helping each other, my goodness, we might as well hang it up.” By August of 2010, the citizens of Vicksburg had lost over 15,000 pounds. They reached their goal of 17,000 pounds within the following few months.

Linda continues to keep the momentum going—offering free nutrition classes and fitness activities, including a once-a-month walk around the city of Vicksburg for anyone who wants to join.

Through the losses of weight have come the gains in self-esteem, energy and a sense of bright optimism for the future. Fitness... Pass It On.

Pass It On.
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