

# Get Active, Orlando

By Kevin Fritz



**Get Active Orlando** aims to show downtown area residents just how easy it can be to fit 30 minutes of activity into their day to stay healthy for life.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation estimates that, by the year 2015, 75 percent of Americans will be overweight or obese unless children and adults start getting more exercise on a regular basis.

While staying fit these days may seem like just another chore in life's hectic schedule, that's not the case with the ideas being encouraged by the volunteers of Get Active Orlando (GAO). Founded as a community partnership thanks to a grant from the Johnson foundation, this group of volunteers has been at it for five years trying to make an impact on the City Beautiful and its surroundings by promoting physical activity in our daily lives. The goal is 30 minutes of activity a day, based on parameters set by the American Heart Association.

Downtown Orlando resident Leah Nash, an avid walker, biker and GAO advocate, says her biggest concern is the growing problem of obesity in children. She fears the simple act of walking somewhere could become extinct. "Here's a message that sticks with me," she says. "Our kids are not going to live as long as we are because of obesity. That's powerful." Her goal is to see children still walking the streets 20 years from now.

## A Push for Walkability

To that end, GAO is now an official Mayor's Advisory Committee for Physical Activity and works with the planning department to ensure sidewalks are wide enough for people to walk on, the streets shadier and the bicycle racks more visible. GAO conducts walkability/bikability surveys, and, based on the results, the city has since instituted a policy to ask developers to consider these initiatives when drawing up plans.

That includes making stairways in buildings more visible, says **Malisa McCreedy**, AICP, parks and recreation planning manager for the City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation. Calling it a "point of choice," she believes if a stairway is the first thing you see when you walk into a building, you might automatically walk a few flights instead of looking for an elevator.

McCreedy, who also serves as the current chairperson for GAO, practices what she preaches. She is currently taking yoga classes and is a strong supporter of riding a bike



In an effort to encourage citizens to bike for their health, Get Active Orlando gave away 10 bicycles to Orange County Health Department clients, along with lights, locks, helmets and safety education.

Photos by Sheri Lowen

to work. Each day, she traverses city streets for eight miles roundtrip from her home in College Park to City Hall, regardless of the weather.

"I don't mind riding in the rain," she says, "as long as there's no thunder and lighting. It makes me feel like a 10-year-old again." She also walks to lunch and meetings as much as possible. It's no doubt she gets in her 30 minutes of activity per day.

## "Sneaky Exercises"

"That's the whole point of this," McCreedy says about GAO's initiatives. "You don't have to go to a gym. You can find [physical activity] in your daily life."

She notes that gardening, taking the dog for a walk or going for a bike ride all constitute healthy living. She likes to call these "sneaky exercises," ones you don't think about in your daily routine. The bottom line is creating an environment where people do not think about being active, McCreedy adds.

**Bridget Monroe**, a real estate agent and downtown Orlando resident, walks every-

where possible and belongs to the YMCA. But her real niche is gardening, something the Robert Johnson foundation encourages as a healthy activity. According to Health magazine, gardening burns around 340 calories per hour for a 150-pound woman and strengthens muscles throughout the body.

Currently, Monroe is creating the Parhamore Community Gardens for GAO, and, at a size of 70 feet by 70 feet (comprising 15 to 20 beds), it's no wonder it falls under the physical fitness umbrella. She notes that not only will the daily toiling be good for area residents, but also they will reap the rewards of healthy vegetables that will end up on their dinner tables. With the folks at Leu Gardens and the Orange County Extension Service overseeing the planting, the harvest should be bountiful. "It's all in an effort to reduce the high rates of high blood pressure and obesity," Monroe says.

Gardening. Walking. Biking. Maybe throw in a little yoga. Who knew the key to healthy living lay in such simple tasks in such a complicated world? ■

WEB LIFE

Find out more about Get Active Orlando initiatives and programs at [www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com](http://www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com).