

## Lower Mainland – New Westminster

### New Westminster takes steps towards a Healthier Community

November 2008

Since taking the 20% by 2010 physical activity challenge, City Hall and School District 40 are showing the people of New Westminster how it's possible to get active every day.

*"We've tried to use the Active Communities movement as a way to generally promote the importance of being well and fit in the community,"* said David Creighton, Manager of Centennial Community Centre for the City's Parks and Recreation Department.

Mayor Wayne Wright and city councillors have participated for the last three years in a pedometer challenge during the month leading up to Move for Health Day (May 10).

As a team, the Mayor and council (the Council Climbers) have also gone head-to-head with School District trustees (the Trustee Trekkers) the past two years to see who could log the most steps in a pedometer challenge – first to walk to Whistler virtually, then to climb Mount Logan (Canada's tallest mountain). They kept track of their steps on their ActNow BC pedometers and in logbooks, and charted their collective progress across a giant map at City Hall. The challenge finished off with a Walk with the Mayor and Council event on Move for Health Day in 2008. The walk attracted 87 people and was funded with a \$300 grant from the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) through its Active Communities Initiative.

*"We really got the elected officials personally involved with showing the community how important it was to be physically active,"* Creighton said. *"We've tried to keep Mayor and council really engaged in what we're doing."*



Council has also shown its support for the initiative by making room in the city budget to include Active Communities programming. In 2007, council approved hiring an Active Communities Programmer. An application has been made in this year's budget to increase the Programmer's hours.

*"If we were going to do it and do it right, we needed to dedicate some resources to it,"* Creighton said.

In addition to creating programming for the public, New Westminster's Active Communities initiative has targeted city employees. These new initiatives are the result of a corporate wellness plan drafted by a committee made up of representatives from different city departments.

City staff can drop in at a discounted rate to City Hall's new on-site fitness centre or to programs at community recreation facilities. And 90 staff, making up a dozen teams, have been challenging each other

through the Walking Works program. It's essentially the same as the New West Walks program that has been marketed to the public.

The Parks and Recreation Department launched New West Walks in the fall of 2007 as a key program in its Active New West plan. The Core Health Technologies website ([www.healthycommunity.ca/NewWest](http://www.healthycommunity.ca/NewWest)) uses Google maps to track steps. Participants can also track their daily fruit and vegetable intake, water consumption and other physical activities. New West Walks was promoted through take-home flyers in schools, newspaper advertisements, posters throughout the city, and on a park reader board. From there, it spread through word of mouth. In its first year, the program has seen more than 1,200 people sign up.

During national Healthy Workplace Month this October, the City received a \$300 grant from BCRPA for a staff walk event and healthy lunch. The walk was promot-

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ed by distributing healthy breakfast cookies to all staff with a note about Healthy Workplace Month. The approximately 30 staff who participated also showed interest in taking part in more group walks. A heritage walk with museum staff is in the works for the New Year.

With increased opportunities to be active both individually and in groups, The City of New Westminster is setting the pace for a more active community.

### Schools plugged into New West Walks virtual walking program

Meanwhile, New Westminster's schools have been stepping up to the activity challenge. Students, teachers and school staff have been leading the way in New West Walks.

*"Our goal when we first started last October was to have 200 people in the year, and we exceeded that in about 3 weeks,"* said Sandy Earle, the City's Active Communities Programmer. *"Overall it's making an impact in increasing the awareness of how active people are."*

Shortly after the New West Walks program was launched, elementary school students as young as kindergarteners were entering their steps onto the activity tracker website. New West Walks was introduced into the school system through a pilot project at Hume Park Community School in February 2008. All 70 students and 20

staff—from the principal to the custodian to the crossing guard—wore pedometers granted through ActNow BC.

*"There wasn't anybody in the school that was not onboard,"* Earle said. *"The kids saw all the adults wearing their pedometers. The message got through; those kids knew that activity was important."*

The school was logging on to the site to virtually re-trace the route of Terry Fox's marathon across Canada.

*"Kids who would normally choose to do something that wasn't very active at recess and at lunch time, once they had their pedometers and they realized that these steps and activities were counting,*



## New Westminster Highlights

- Developed an Active Community plan and Corporate Wellness plan
- Started the New West Walks online pedometer/activity tracking program: [www.healthycommunity.ca/NewWest](http://www.healthycommunity.ca/NewWest)
- Brought New West Walks into schools and to City Employees
- Held a pedometer/walking challenge for city councillors leading up to Move for Health Day since 2006, and included school trustees in 2007 & 2008
- Pedometer challenge at Hume Park Community School virtually re-traced Terry Fox's cross-Canada Marathon of Hope route
- 3 elementary schools did a virtual walk up Mt. Logan (tallest mountain in Canada) through New West Walks
- Partnered with Canatrek-Summits of Canada for Mt. Logan virtual climb following the progress of a real climbing team
- Formed Corporate Wellness Committee for City employees
- Established a subsidy program for City staff to participate in drop-in programs at Parks and Recreation facilities at a reduced rate
- Built a fitness room at City Hall for group fitness classes and individual use
- Awarded pedometers through the ActNow BC Activity Challenge pedometer grants program
- Received \$300 grants from BCRPA for Move for Health Day (Walk with the Mayor) and Healthy Workplace Month (City Hall employees walk)
- Piloted and continued a Grade 5 Get Active program offering free access to drop-in recreation programs
- Evaluating initiative using BCRPA's TRACE tool (Tools and Resources for Active Communities Evaluation)
- City funding an Active Communities Programmer staff position
- 14 schools in School District No. 40 registered through Action Schools! BC

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*they actually made the effort, even on rainy days, to go outside and do something active,”* Earle observed.

Earle credits the success of the Hume Park School pilot to having teacher Stephanie Musgrove spearhead the project and keep students and staff motivated.

*“If you don’t have somebody there that’s really the champion for your cause, we don’t get as far,”* Earle said. *“If you do have somebody there that’s really keen, it really does take off.”*

Once the students became comfortable using the website, they started logging their steps and other activities outside of school.

*“It really brought home to kids that it’s not just what you’re doing at school,*

*it’s all those other things outside,”* Earle said. *“We had parents that came in and signed up for New West Walks because their kids were doing the program at school. It got the whole family involved.”*

All the schools in District 40 are registered Action Schools through Action Schools! BC. The success of the pilot project inspired other schools to start walking more. In the spring, Hume Park and two other schools (F.W. Howay and John Robson Elementary) joined city council and school trustees in a virtual trek up Mount Logan. The students followed a real climbing team’s ascent, while watching their own individual progress on the website’s virtual map. The program was a partnership with Canatrek-Summits of Canada. Climbing team leader James

Coleridge took a New Westminster flag up with him to the summit. He visited Hume Park School and City council at the end of the trek to present the flag.

*“We got a lot of press coverage from that, getting the Active Communities message out through this one event,”* Earle noted.

Another new initiative in the schools is the Grade 5 Get Active pass program. It offers free access to drop-in recreation programs and facilities. Following the success of the Grade 5 program in Delta and the Tri-Cities, New Westminster tested the program in 2008 from February to August. Sixty-five per cent of the eligible Grade 5 students in the District visited recreation facilities and got the pass.



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*“The Grade 5 Get Active program is eliminating some barriers for lower-income families,”* Earle said. For the 2008/2009 school year, council has approved keeping the program in place.

*“Council was unanimous in its support of this new initiative because the benefits were clearly pointing the way to the continuation of the program,”* Creighton said.

Following the success of physical activity programs in the schools and at City Hall, the Active Communities initiative in New Westminster will continue to keep reaching out to support people’s efforts to adopt healthy lifestyles.

*“The walking program is a really great way for people to start,”* Earle said. *“We’ve heard from so many people that it’s been a huge motivator for them.”*



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## New Westminster Info

**Population:** 62,607 (BC Stats 2007)

- The first capital city of B.C, the first city to have an elected municipal government, and the first city in western Canada
- Nicknamed “The Royal City” after Queen Victoria gave the city its name
- Overlooks the Fraser River
- 48 parks, including tennis courts, lacrosse boxes, playgrounds, spray parks, outdoor pools, and sports fields
- 350 acres of parks and green space
- Recreation facilities include the Canada Games Pool, Centennial Community Centre, Moody Park Arena, Century House, Queen’s Park Arenex, Queen’s Park Arena & Queensborough Community Centre

[www.newwestminster.ca](http://www.newwestminster.ca)

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