



Lake Country Gets Active in its own Backyard

May 2008



When residents in the District of Lake Country head through their town these days, they look up and see banners with familiar faces getting active in many different ways.

The street banners are the latest project of Active Communities Lake Country's Be Here, Be Active campaign. The 31 banners hanging from lamp posts portray 42 different photos of local people doing activities like gardening, playing at the beach, playing hockey, hiking, cycling, playing soccer, and Nordic walking.

"On one side you have a little girl on a bike, and the other side is a senior throwing a horseshoe," said the District of Lake Country's Leisure Services Coordinator Sheila Gunn.

The banners are just one of the ways residents are getting the message that there are endless opportunities to participate

in physical activities in Lake Country. The community already has a vibrant network of sports organizations offering organized sports leagues, but Gunn also wants to show people alternative ways to get active within the community.

"The plan was to represent physical activity that isn't just the standard sports," Gunn said. *"Going out into your yard is being physically active. It doesn't have to be organized sports to be considered active."*

When creating the banners, she looked at first at generic stock pictures but they didn't feel right to her. So instead she acquired many photos from a local photographer, Steve Kidd, who over the years had captured images of people out and about in the community.

"It's home-grown," Gunn said. *"People are very proud of the banners. People feel really excited about being up there. I have people wanting to be up there—I just told them they have to get more involved."*

A \$5,000 Active Communities grant from the BC Recreation and Parks Association, along with contributions from the District's budget, funded the banners project. Gunn hopes to continue displaying banners with new photos as new lamp posts are added.

To let people know where they can go to get active in the parks and trails, the District partnered with two community groups—the Lake Country Public Art Commission and WALC (Walk Around Lake Country)—to produce a new trail guide.

- Printed street banners with pictures of locals getting active
- Branded its initiative: Be Here, Be Active
- Started the Lake Country Outdoors Club: www.lakecountryoutdoorsclub.com
- Partnered with WALC group (Walk Around Lake Country) & Lake Country Public Art Commission to produce trail guide
- Move for Health Day Power Walk with the Mayor
- Spirit of BC Week laser skate
- Lake Country Steps Out pedometer walking program

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“It’s to encourage people to visit our parks and also visit and admire the public art that is displayed in them,” Gunn said. *“So we’ve promoted our parks, our trails, and our public art all together.”*

In addition, a new outdoors club has formed out of Lake Country’s Active Communities initiative that leads people through trails. The outdoors club has outings for hiking, biking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, for various levels. The club is seeing participation from all ages, from mothers with back packs to older adults.

“The outdoors club, the trail guide being put together, all of those things are results of the Active Communities initiative,” Gunn said.

The Be Here, Be Active logo is not only printed on the banners, but also in leisure guides, the trail guide, the outdoors club website (www.lakecountryoutdoorsclub.com), park signs, and it’s even painted on the wall of the community gym and weight room.

Gunn’s office is in the secondary school—a shared-use facility between the School District and the District of Lake Country—so she’s developed connections with the students, both as volunteers and participants.

“If I’m looking for volunteers for helping, I draw on them and they’re there, so it’s a really nice partnership,” Gunn noted.

For Spirit of BC Week, the District received

a \$300 active event grant from BCRPA to put on a free laser skate at the Winfield Arena. Hordes of tweens and teens came to ice skate with their friends that Friday night, with coloured lighting and music from a DJ. Gunn said it was such a hit with the youth and parents that it will become a monthly event starting this fall.

“It’s in a safe environment and they’re also physically active,” Gunn said. *“I think it was the biggest Friday night skate the arena had ever had.”*

For Move for Health Day in May, Gunn got another Active Communities mini-grant from BCRPA to organize a power walk at Swalwell Park. Four hundred people came out, including 300 secondary students and Mayor James Baker.

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Throughout the year, people have been stepping out with pedometers, tracking their progress on a virtual walk around Europe through the Lake Country Steps Out website (www.stepsout.com/lake-country). Lake Country was awarded pedometers through the ActNow BC Activity Challenge. Of Lake Country's 10,000-plus residents, many now are wearing pedometers. Walking clubs have started up in the community, heading out from a park, a seniors' living complex, and a pharmacy. A running club has also formed.

"There are some really strong friendships that have formed from there," Gunn

said. *"I think that leads to a healthy community as well—people feeling included, getting to know others in their community. All these hidden benefits are the real rewards."*

To gauge the impact of awareness-raising efforts like the banners, Gunn plans to survey the community at Summer Jam, a summer event this August.

"We have everything here to be active, so be here in Lake Country and be active in your own community. We don't have to go anywhere—we have it all. That's the message I want to send."

"Going out into your yard is being physically active. It doesn't have to be organized sports to be considered active."

- Sheila Gunn

Lake Country Info

Population: 10,367 (BC Stats 2005)

- District incorporated as a municipality in 1995
- Located in the Okanagan Valley between Kelowna and Vernon
- 4 communities: Carr's Landing, Okanagan Centre, Oyama & Winfield
- Surrounded by Okanagan Lake, Wood Lake & Kalamalka Lake
- Home to the Okanagan First Nation
- Major industries: agriculture & tourism
- Community complex, seniors' centre, athletic fields, parks, beaches, arena, curling rink, skateboard park, horseshoe pitches
- Annual Art Walk

www.lakecountry.bc.ca

