

Summerland gets people active during all seasons

November 2008

A weekly guided walk throughout the winter has snowballed for a group of previously inactive Summerland residents who are now getting involved in other new activities year-round.

The group walks are part of the District of Summerland's Steps Out program – an online activity tracker/pedometer program that began in neighbouring Penticton (www.stepsout.com). Participants log their steps using pedometers from the ActNow BC pedometer grants program. Now entering its third year, word of the weekly walks has spread.

“These people are the champions so they push it forward and meet socially and draw a few other people in,” said Lois Dickinson, District of Summerland Recreation Programmer, who leads Summerland's Active Communities initiative. The Wednesday walks starting from the recreation centre have continued through rain, snow and ice. The group walks allow a variety of individuals to take the first step towards a healthier lifestyle—from people with physical health concerns to an 83-year-old who leads the pack.

“Everybody was so supportive with each other in the group,” Dickinson said. *“The group would walk for an hour and then a smaller group would continue on their own and go up Giant's Head Mountain.”*

“One person that started out last year has stepped into the role of the caboose,” she observed. *“I really feel that it's always the last people in the walk that need the most encouragement and support. Now, the caboose frequently does a 10K walk. But he will now walk all the time with the slowest people; he's taken that role.”*

Some of the walkers use Nordic Poles for stability or added intensity after attending free workshops offered by Jana McFarlane of Keenfit Poles.

To encourage them to branch out to other activities, Steps Out participants received coupons for a free trial of a fitness class or aquafit class. They can convert the exercise from those activities into steps using the Steps Out website.

“Walking was the first step towards fitness for a lot of people, and they have continued on with diet changes and food discussions,” she said. *“A few of the people have gone on to do a coronary heart improvement program, which is taking bigger steps.”*

On top of the feedback Dickinson hears on the walks, participants have also submitted testimonials for the Steps Out website to inspire others. One of those is from a self-described data junkie who found the website's step tracking to be

motivational and rewarding. He shared that, *“Summerland Steps Out definitely contributes to my physical and emotional well-being, presents opportunities to try new things and to meet people.”*

Another participant wrote, *“One year later...20 lbs. lighter and feeling a whole lot healthier! Joining Summerland Steps Out was the first step in a very positive year for me. The walks, introduction to fitness classes and support has helped transform and strengthen my body and mind! Thank you for your encouragement Lois and keep on motivating your steppers.”*

As of November, the Summerland Steps Out website had 167 participants. Not only has participation increased, but so have fitness levels.

“When we started in December, most of our walks were a couple of kilometres, and by April we were doing 5K walks,” Dickinson said.



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- Lois Dickinson

Her goal was for some of the walkers to register for the annual five-kilometre Giant's Head walk/run at the community's Action Festival. A number of the group's members did participate in the event in the walk division. Some also volunteered to help the organizers. The same group also came out for the Terry Fox Run.

"These individuals had never participated in anything like that before," Dickinson noted.

The Steps Out participants were also introduced to hiking and walking routes in neighbouring communities through the Hiking the Okanagan Valley with Steps Out guided treks. Each Active Community (Penticton, Kelowna, Summerland, Westside, Lake Country, Peachland and Osoyoos) offered a free guided hike in the fall. Summerland's hike took the group of 40 along the historic Kettle Valley Steam Railway and the Trout Creek Canyon Trestle—the highest bridge along the railway.

"They're exploring different communities and meeting different people," Dickinson observed. *"When they're walking, they're talking to people, so it's very good networking for participants."* Some Summerland Steps Out participants have gone to Penticton to hear its Steps Out motivational speakers.

Throughout the year, Summerland participates in wider campaigns to get people active. Grants of \$300 from the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) went towards community walks on Move for Health Day on May 10 and a free public skate during Spirit of BC Week in February.

Summerland also has an Active Community plan in development, after working on it with BCRPA's Active Communities Community Developer.

"I find having the plan in front of me even though it is unfinished is rewarding to see where the ideas came from and to see things actually happening," Dickinson said. *"It's a very positive reinforcement for me. It's good to look at and re-group."*

Looking forward, Dickinson hopes the people who did the five-kilometre walk will do 10 kilometres at the next Action Festival. In the meantime, she plans to continue putting out the word to let people know that the first step may be the hardest one to take, but it's followed by others that lead to a path of health and well-being.

Summerland Highlights

- Reaching the inactive through the Summerland Steps Out online activity tracker program (www.stepsout.com/summerland)
- Guided weekly walks throughout the winter
- Nordic Pole walking clinics
- Partnering with Okanagan Valley communities for Steps Out guided hikes
- Received pedometers from ActNow BC Activity Challenge pedometer grants program
- Hosted Move for Health Day community walks on May 10 in 2007 & 2008
- Hosted a free public skate during Spirit of BC Week
- Received grants from BCRPA for Move for Health Day (\$300) and Spirit of BC Week (\$300)
- Host site of BCRPA's Active Communities Regional Roundtable in 2007
- Engaging youth in volunteerism for recreation centre events

Summerland Info

Population: 11,563 (BC Stats 2007)

- Located in the Okanagan Valley beside Okanagan Lake between Penticton & Kelowna
- Outdoor recreation activities include golfing, boating, kayaking, swimming, biking, hiking, fishing, tennis, alpine and cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, skateboard park
- Site of Giant's Head Mountain Park and a portion of the Trans-Canada Trail
- Indoor facilities include Aquatic & Fitness Centre, Arena Complex and Curling Club

www.summerland.ca
www.summerlandchamber.bc.ca
www.getawaybc.com