



## Fort St. John Keeps on Trekking

Written in June 2007

Three years after the City of Fort St. John launched the Walk to Whistler initiative, participants continue on their virtual trek to the site of the 2010 Olympics.

The City developed the Walk to Whistler online physical activity tracker program in June 2004 in response to Premier Gordon Campbell's call to make BC the fittest place to ever host the Olympic Games. Fort St. John then put out a challenge to other communities to show their support for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games and to improve citizens' health by virtually walking to Whistler.

Participants use their own pedometers to log their daily steps online for free at [www.walktowhistler.com](http://www.walktowhistler.com). The site converts their steps to kilometers. To motivate walkers, the City offered draw prizes. The grand prize is a trip to Whistler for the 2010 Olympic opening ceremonies.

A few months after its launch, the program had spread to communities across Canada and the western United States, and the growing number of participants had exceeded 100,000 kilometers—or 120 million steps. Later that year, companies and other groups started logging their steps. Some municipalities challenged each other to see which region was the fittest.



In November 2005, Fort St. John registered as an Active Community after council accepted the "20% Challenge".

In 2006, Fort St. John participated in Discovery Research's pilot measurement survey of community physical activity levels through BCRPA. Now, on top of continuing to organize the Walk to Whistler program for the area, Fort St. John's Active Community team has developed programming for specific target groups.

### BUILDING COMMUNITY

The City's Community Services Department has been collaborating with local partners through the Fort St. John Healthy Living Alliance, with representatives including School District 60 and Northern Health.



On Move for Health Day (May 10, 2007), 65 people walked from City Hall to Centennial Park. Six elementary schools had 100% participation among students when they walked around their schools. To reward them, the rec centre provided free passes worth an hour at the pool. A walk for everyone in the region was also held at the Fish Creek Community Forest.

*"That was the first time we've ever done that and it worked out really well,"* said the City's Active Living Coordinator, Stephanie Peters.



To increase walking opportunities, Fort St. John's bypass walking trail is extending to Northern Lights College this year (2007). Walkers can continue using the trail throughout the winter, when the lit trail will be cleared of snow.

To get teens ages 13 to 16 active, Community Services put on a Teen Adventure Day in June. Activities included skateboarding classes and an obstacle course.



The City has created brochures for Walk to Whistler as well as its new active initiatives—the Active Living Fit-Start Program and the Girls Exercise Program—to increase awareness of these initiatives.

## Peace River/Liard – Fort St. John



The Active Living Fit-Start program is a six-week, guided exercise program for people with cardiac problems or chronic disease. It aims to help people become comfortable exercising independently by increasing their confidence.

The Girls Exercise Program was a pilot program for inactive girls, with about 18 girls participating over a couple of months. The program encourages young women to get active and stay active.

*“We offered different kinds of exercises or different kinds of activities that you could do in our community,”* Peters said. *“We wanted to show the girls that there were options out there other than just sports.”*

Classes included hip-hop, yoga, boot camp and aquafit. The idea was to introduce them to various ways to get active that are focused more on having fun than on competing. Various private gyms volunteered to teach the classes to the girls.

*“Their attitude changed quite a bit and they realized that there was quite a lot more opportunity for them in Fort St. John to get active and it doesn’t have to cost a lot of money,”* Peters said. She is

now seeking funding to keep the program going.

Next, Peters hopes to connect with workplaces to encourage workplace wellness initiatives, in addition to continuing to advance Fort St. John’s Active Community program.

*“I really want to try to focus on Active Communities and try to get involved and try to promote Fort St. John as an Active Community,”* Peters said.



## Fort St. John Highlights

- Took a lead role provincially by challenging other communities to implement the Walk to Whistler online tracker program
- Conducted a baseline measurement survey of physical activity levels in the community
- Organizing walks on Move for Health Day in schools, workplaces and the community
- Started an Active Living Fit Start program, a six-week, guided exercise program for people with cardiac problems or chronic disease
- Ran a Girls Exercise Program pilot project to introduce inactive girls to various physical activity options in the community
- 11 schools in School District 60 registered with Action! Schools BC
- Launched [www.walktowhistler.com](http://www.walktowhistler.com)

## Fort St. John Info

- **Population:** 17,781 (BC Stats 2005)
- **Region:** Peace River/Liard
- **About Fort St. John:** Fort St. John is known as the Energetic City, with its oil and gas, agriculture, tourism and construction industries. It is the largest regional service centre in northeast BC and the largest city on the Alaska Highway. The community is located north of the Peace River. Fort St. John’s recreation facilities include a recreation centre, leisure pool, skating oval, curling rink, tennis and volleyball courts, golf courses, a kids arena, a spray park and a skateboard park. In addition, there are numerous outdoor sport and recreation opportunities in the region’s forests, valleys, rivers and lakes. The majority of the population is young families.

(Source: [www.fortstjohn.ca](http://www.fortstjohn.ca), [www.bcadventure.com](http://www.bcadventure.com))