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GOVERNOR
Jim Gibbons

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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State Employees Lose a Ton of Weight in a Wellness Challenge

Winners to Be Announced Thursday June 28

The winning employees of the state of Nevada Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation's (DETR) Wellness Challenge will be presented with cash prizes and trophies Thursday for losing the most weight during a five-month long competition. The Wellness Challenge, which focused on weight loss and healthy living resulted in employees losing 2,025 pounds altogether. The First Place prizes will be awarded at 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 28 at the Sparks JobConnect at 1675 East Prater Way, Suite 103 Sparks, NV 89434.

The competition included 228 employees, composing 28 teams, who competed to see who could lose the most weight. Some employees who didn't need to lose weight participated with the goal of improving their cholesterol or blood pressure, said Terry Johnson, DETR director. Others participated to start living healthier.

One state employee, Ginny Miller at the Sparks JobConnect, has lost 104 pounds and will be crowned DETR's Wellness Challenge Individual Winner on Thursday.

Miller said she had tried to lose weight prior to the challenge and had not been successful. Although the Challenge is ending, she is working toward losing even more weight.

"This was a wonderful thing and I'm going to keep going," she said. "I've lost too much weight to stop now. I want to get to my goal. When it started, it was about the competition, but once the team got into it, we kept going. It just

snowballed. With every pound or ounce I lost, I felt better. It has helped my energy level tremendously. I just feel better.”

Johnson came up with the idea of the Wellness Challenge to encourage good health among DETR’s 700 employees. Healthy living is especially an important topic for Johnson, as he has served as Chairman of the Nevada Public Employees Benefit Program board (PEPB) for the past six years. The board has consistently looked for ways to encourage employees to take accountability for their own health, he said.

The PEPB Board found that seven out of 10 illnesses that were being paid for by the insurance plan were preventable illnesses, Johnson said. PEPB began offering employees a wellness benefit that allows them to get free testing for certain diseases and participate in wellness programs, like smoking cessation and weight loss, Johnson said.

“It’s no secret that obesity is at an all-time high in this country. It has become a national health crisis,” Johnson said. “While individuals must take responsibility for their health, many people need support to lose weight and change their habits. I’m glad that this competition was a catalyst for change for a number of DETR employees. We at PEPB encourage public employees to take advantage of the wellness benefits to help them on their journey to good health.”

Governor Jim Gibbons applauded Johnson and DETR for their efforts.

“I commend the DETR employees for their accomplishments in losing weight and improving their health,” Gibbons said. “They have set a good example for other public employees to follow. I am impressed with their fortitude and ingenuity in organizing such an effort.”

Johnson created a DETR Wellness Committee, made up of employees, to work out the logistics of the competition and to determine ways to keep momentum going during and after the Challenge. The teams gave themselves creative names, like the Luck Losers Club, The Potluck Professionals and Flab-u-less. Johnson also participated on a team, the DETRminators, and lost 43 pounds, reaching the goal he set for himself for the Wellness Challenge.

“We challenged ourselves to lose a ton and we exceeded that goal. We also challenged ourselves to just become healthier by making better food choices and by exercising. Losing weight was the result of this wellness movement,” Johnson said. “Having employees in good health is essential to a productive work environment. Promoting good health is good business. It makes employees feel better about themselves and it improves morale. Employees became more health conscious, bringing in fruit and veggie trays for meetings, instead of doughnuts.”

Weigh-ins were conducted by employees not participating in the challenge, who served as proctors. Each team's percent of weight loss for the week was announced in a wellness newsletter that also included weight loss tips and other healthy lifestyle information. Each person participating donated \$5 that will be used for prizes. On Thursday, Johnson will present trophies and cash prizes to the top three teams and the individual employee who lost the most weight. Each month, Johnson traveled to the winning team's office to present a trophy for the most weight lost in a month.

Participants received support from team members by sharing healthy tips, recipes and exercising together, Johnson said. Team members often walked during breaks and at lunch. Employees also held wellness lunches, which allowed people to experiment with healthy recipes, Johnson said.

"I am proud of what these men and women have accomplished," Johnson said. "They've worked very hard, not only to lose weight, but to develop good habits and abandon bad ones. The Wellness Challenge gave them that extra push they needed to get on the road to good health."

Valerie Popovich, a member of the Lucky Losers Club, said she has joined a gym and has gotten her family to start eating healthy.

"I plan to keep doing this, so I can continue to have a healthier lifestyle and feel and look better," she said. "It was helpful having people to do this with. Before the Challenge, people in the office would bring in candy, cookies, and cakes. Now, nobody brings in that kind of food. We don't want to tempt each other."



DETR is comprised of the Employment Security Division, Equal Rights Commission, Rehabilitation Division, the Information Development and Processing Division and the Research and Analysis Bureau.

DETR works in partnership with the Nevada JobConnect System to connect businesses and workers.