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Amy Lopez shows a free pedometer to bus operators Josephine Lenoir, Carolyn Lee and Latricia Cramer. The idea is to track the mileage walked during a week.



Photos by Ned Racine

## What Does 5 Pounds of Fat Look Like? Ask Division 9 Employees

- Second annual fair promotes healthier lifestyles

By NED RACINE

(Nov. 8, 2007) San Gabriel Valley Division 9 presented a health fair, Oct. 25, featuring health professionals bursting with information on creating a healthier life. The hit of the event, however, was a five-pound glob of yellow plastic.

That rubbery glob represented five pounds of fat. Many employees could not believe its size and appearance. Some could not resist holding it.

Suzy Corbett, a health education coordinator for Huntington Hospital in Pasadena, uses the glob to gain attention. "They're very surprised," said Corbett, who is a nutritionist by training, of the employees' reaction. "They like the shock value."

Corbett was one of several health professionals who spoke to employees during the division's second health fair, part of its effort to improve employee health.

"They create a lot of energy and focus," said Doug Middleton, a transportation manager at the division.

Middleton estimates that 100 Division 9 employees are involved in some activity growing out of the Health and Wellness effort, a one-year pilot program initiated by Corporate Safety.

Reduction in work injuries

"Hopefully, over time, we [will] see a reduction in absenteeism and a reduction in work injuries," Middleton said. "Healthier employees are going to be happier employees."

And so far that seems to be the case, although Middleton thinks one year of results would be needed to evaluate the program. "We do now have employees who have lost a substantial amount of weight. Some are just making better choices about what they're eating."

Visiting Corbett's nutrition table was Glenn Gatewood, one of those thinner employees. Gatewood, who has worked for Metro for 17 years, received a health warning from his doctor earlier this year.

Since then, Gatewood, a facilities system technician, has lost 70 pounds. "I thought I should make some changes. It was a lifestyle change for me."

Arlene Mills, who operates buses on lines 38 and 71, was also surprised by Corbett's displays. "This is the best investment the agency makes in us," she said of the health fair.

A 15-year Metro employee, Mills likes to walk for causes, such as AIDS research. She also participates in an 8.3-mile walk for the homeless.



Suzy Corbett, a nutritionist, holds a plastic blob representing five pounds of fat. Corbett also displayed four plastic cups on her table. Cup "B," for example, represented the fat in one all-beef hot dog or one-half of an avocado. "They're especially surprised that something that says 'no sugar' has so much fat in it," Corbett said of cup "D," which was equivalent to a no-sugar-added banana nut muffin.

**Regular dental exams**

Norah Teague, a chiropractor, offered health tips, as did Philip Taylor of Smile Finders. Teague showed a simple way to stretch neck muscles. Taylor reminded employees of the importance of regular dental



Norah Teague, a chiropractor, shows Michael Montero, a Division 9 bus operator, the value of stretching out his neck muscles. She later showed him how a simple hand towel can be used as a basic cervical brace to stretch muscles.

exams.

"If you go to the dentist every six months, you're not going to have an emergency," Taylor explained. "You owe it to yourself."

Amy Lopez, who organized the event for Metro, included a seminar by the American Cancer Society later in the day. She hoped to keep employees "mindful of what they are putting in their bodies and trying to make [a] positive change."

Richard Lopez, no relation to Amy, is a bus operator and a cheerleader for

the division's lunchtime walking program. An 18-year Metro veteran, he tries to accomplish two things by encouraging fellow employees to walk with him: get people to exercise more and to show them it's not so hard to exercise.

"We want it to come from within," he explained. "The agency can [only] do so much with providing these kinds of health fairs" for employees. Lopez and his fellow walkers cover a little over two miles during their lunch exercise as they traverse the division's parking lots.

Lopez wants operators to sign up for walking not only to benefit themselves but to benefit the community they serve. He wants Metro bus operators to be a role model for healthy living.

He also draws a link between operator fitness and transit safety. "When they get on our bus system, we are responsible for their safety and their wellness. That is a huge responsibility."