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Wellness Program Advocate Continues Shrinking Herself to a Better Life

- Checking in with Rebecca Benitez reveals a new person in the mirror

By Ned Racine, Editor

(Sept. 30, 2008). When we last checked in with Rebecca Benitez, San Gabriel Valley Division 9 bus operator, in late [June 2008](#), she had lost 160 pounds, nearly 100 of those since joining Metro's Wellness Program.



Rebecca Benitez, a San Gabriel Valley Division 9 bus operator, has lost over 100 pounds since integrating the Metro Wellness Program into her life.



It would be understandable if she had added a couple of pounds or simply maintained her weight. Understandable, but inaccurate.

After losing 30 additional pounds since June, Benitez has been getting to know the new person who looks back at her in the mirror.

Free of the blood pressure and diabetes medicine she formerly took, Benitez continues to credit Amy Lopez, Health and Wellness Program manager, with spurring her remarkable improvement in health.

"It was her dedication that made my dedication," Benitez said. "I had to give that much more to show her I was giving as much as she was. She's very persistent. Without her, I wouldn't be where I am."

When she first came to the El Monte division, however, Benitez wasn't so open to Lopez' persuasion. "I thought everything [Amy] said was hogwash," Benitez recalled.

But when a manager told her she was obese and her weight might affect her career at Metro, the comment made her think.

"That was pretty traumatic," Benitez recalled, mentioning that she still feels insulted by the remark. "I never had someone say something like

that to me."

"I have always been extremely big, but it never has stopped me from doing something," said the 25-year Metro veteran, recalling that she choose some activities just so she could show that a large woman could do them.

To remake herself, Benitez reshaped her life. She believes the biggest change she made was in altering her eating habits. She describes herself as a former "sugar addict" capable of eating five candy bars, one after the other. Now she is a conscientious food label reader.

"It's a big change; it not only affects me, it affects everyone in this house," Benitez said. For example, instead of cakes or candies, she buys fruit. For Mother's Day her husband Peter bought her sugar-free candy.

"There is nothing in this house anymore!" her children complain, missing their snacks. Benitez turns a deaf ear.

The second half of Benitez's reshaped life is regular exercise, something she never embraced before. During the break in her split shift, she walks, bikes, uses the elliptical machine and the treadmills at Division 9. And with less weight bearing on her artificial knees, Benitez plans on walking the upcoming Diabetes Walk 5K on Nov. 1 and the March of Dimes 5K next year.

Besides better health, her weight loss brought small pleasures, such as buying dresses off the rack. Before, she hated shopping for clothes. When she was bigger, she made her own dresses, which her daughter and son called Mu Mus, shapeless dresses Benitez wore very large. Now, she loves to buy something sleek in her current size.

In fact, Benitez currently wears the same size as her daughter Annie, 21, which has its good and bad points. Benitez recently bought a "very nice dress," which her daughter admired and immediately wanted to wear. "Do you mind if I wear it *first*?" Benitez asked, retelling the story with a long laugh.

A recent trip to Disneyland with her husband revealed another small pleasure—Benitez rode a rollercoaster. That was the first time in years she was able to enjoy an amusement park ride. When she was larger, she could not pull down the restraining bar over her lap.

Even her work day has changed because of Benitez's weight loss. Some of her infrequent passengers do not recognize her; she no longer needs to push her seat back to create space between her and the steering wheel.

While enjoying all the benefits her weight loss has brought her, Benitez sometimes feels she is borrowing someone else's body. "Where did all these bones come from?" she sometimes asks herself.

And when she sees herself in the mirror, she still sometimes asks herself, "Who is that woman? I see me and I don't know who 'she' is yet," Benitez explained. "I hope my personality didn't change; I don't think it has."

And while she continues to make adjustments to her diminished profile, she can take solace in her daughter's reaction to a recent photo of her mother: "Oh, my God, my mother's a hottie!"

