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Lunch Walkers @ Metro on the move: Foreground, Vilma Hernandez and Fanny Ortiz. First row, from left, Martha Ramirez, Bertha Brunner, Elizabeth (Liz) Silva, Samira Baghdikian, Helen Cosner, Barbara Burns, Milagritos Acosta, Milca Elorriaga, Moonela Carter. Back row, from left, Dalila Valles, Dewitt Ruth, Maria Lechuga, Maria Lopez, Patricia Chen, Claudia Casasola, Tatiana Martinez and Marie Tervalon.

Photos: Gayle Anderson

Lunch Walkers support one another to stay in step

By LAURA KLOTH
myMetro.net

(Jan. 27, 2009) Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing.

Take the Lunch Walkers @ Metro club. Members get a little nudge every morning from Customer Relations Agent Vilma Hernandez. The soft-spoken, small-framed lunch-walking leader shoots off emails around mid-morning to remind members that it's time to move.

"Not only are we motivated to walk but as we walk, we motivate others to eat healthier. I really believe this has helped us to continue doing it. When you do it by yourself, you don't have anyone asking about it," Hernandez said.

The typical goal is to walk 30 to 35 minutes, three times a week. Some walkers like to complete a three-loop trek through the Union Station tunnel, into the Metropolitan Water District building, and back toward the Red Line entrance. Others prefer to hike up and down the stairs 20 times, and others walk alone before or after work due to scheduling conflicts.

"Walkers that can't walk upstairs because of their knees can take the escalators," Hernandez says.

"For me, it's been a blessing. I've gotten to know more people. We talk and

walk socializing and exercising," she says.

Hernandez launched the club over a year ago at the suggestion of her boss, Gail Harvey, director of customer relations. Harvey said she encouraged Hernandez with "the objective of helping people become fit and more health conscious."



Gail Harvey, shown here on a trek around the transit plaza, lost 18 pounds on her mile-a-day routine.

The club received \$300 in Metro seed money to purchase pedometers and now more than 20 members walk regularly. Some walkers have lost weight and maintained it, while others have improved their overall health.

Perhaps the most dramatic change occurred to Harvey, who lost 18 pounds after kicking her morning walking routine into full gear six months ago. Not only did she start walking a few times a week, she also cut out pasta and sugar from her diet and that's made a difference, she says.

"I do feel better and continue to make an effort to walk about one mile each day. That made me confident enough to participate in the Diabetes 2-Mile Walk," Harvey said. "I am constantly encouraged by Mrs. Hernandez to push myself, and I plan to try a three-mile walk soon."

Last year, the group collectively raised \$5,000 for breast cancer research by participating in the Revlon Walk, and they also joined other Metro departments in the Diabetes 2-Mile event, which netted another \$5,000.

Customer Service Agent Fanny Ortiz smiles as she talks about losing three pant sizes since she started. She said her walking regimen has helped her shed the weight she put on while caring for a child recovering from open heart surgery.

"There's many times when I feel like giving up. When I feel like that, somebody will push me," Ortiz says.

Dalila Valles says the midday ritual has helped her lose weight and lower her blood pressure, and her co-workers have also encouraged her to eat healthier.

Some of the walkers started a salad club where they contribute money and time each week by taking turns buying and creating nutritious salads.

"I love it. Otherwise I really don't eat vegetables when I get home," Valles said. "I still eat out but, at work, I practice eating healthy."

With this year's \$300 allocation, Hernandez plans to purchase T-Shirts for the members, who usually change into casual clothes and sneakers for their

walks.

"I feel good knowing that I am able to motivate them," says Hernandez. She welcomes interested employees by saying, "When you're ready, we'll be here for you."

[MORE:](#) It's been a year since the first walkabout. See [myMetro.net report](#)

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