

These moms were made for walking

By: Gabriel Ramirez/Special to MĀS

Description: And that's just what they've done, improving their health and neighborhood at the same time

Topics:

Posted by admin Thu Jul 26, 2007 10:51:01 PDT

Viewed 54 times

0 responses 0 comments



Spider-Man might have the skills to defeat Venom and the Sandman, but he's got nothing on a group of vigilant moms, who have united to start a fitness revolution and create a positive change in their neighborhood at the same time.

Known as the Greenfield Walking Group, this group of women spend their mornings, from 8 to 9:30 a.m., Monday through Friday, walking around Stiern Park on Monitor Street in south Bakersfield.

Sure, they walk and talk and exercise.

But they also keep an eye on the area's streets.

In many ways, the Greenfield Walking Group is a roving neighborhood watch with members who are establishing and maintaining some great, healthy habits.

"These moms have been responsible for many positive changes in their own neighborhood, but more importantly, to their health and the health of their children," said Jennifer Lopez, Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator, who works with the grassroots group. "They have shown the motivation and dedication to learning more about how they can not only help themselves but their neighborhoods as well."

So who exactly are the members of this League of Super Moms, ready to fight for good health and a good neighborhood in a single bound — or in this case, single stroll?

Currently, they are 60 Greenfield residents — mostly women, and some bring their kids along, even in strollers — who have the support of the Kern County Obesity Prevention Task Force of the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program.

Originally, 25 residents met at a nutrition class and were given the opportunity to begin a walking group through the Greenfield Family Resource Center.

The group has now been walking since October.

"Group members not only form bonds with each other as they walk around the park, they invite community organizations who can help them access information and resources they need to make healthy, transformative community changes," said Lopez.

The moms have gone through informational sessions, including topics such as air quality, accessing health care and patients' rights.

Among these walking mothers is Gema Perez, 41.

Perez is one of the moms who began walking to better her health and now does it to set an example for her family and community.

"One of the things we do to better the neighborhood is report graffiti when we see it," she said. "We also report lights that are broken, stray dogs and broken bottles and needles we find at the park."

The group has also spilled the beans on speeders and has meetings with the police to talk about issues of concern around the neighborhood.



“We have had a lot of satisfaction by doing what we do. We have become better individuals,” Perez said. “One of our highlights was when Mayor Harvey Hall sent a bus for the group and met with us to congratulate us for the work we are doing.”

Speaking of receiving recognition, Perez traveled to Sacramento in May as one of 11 mothers from California – and the only one from the Central Valley – to be recognized as a “Hero Mom” for making a change to live a healthier life with their family and community.

The “Hero Mom” recognitions were sponsored by the California Department of Public Health.

“It was amazing and emotional. I felt very important and it just felt nice,” Perez said. “I felt very proud, and now I feel even more committed to continue being an example.”

The walking group has also been a huge support for Leticia Encima, 39.

Encima began walking with the group last February after suffering from depression and nervousness.

“Walking with the group, I felt more secure and didn’t feel so depressed,” Encima said. “I met a lot of friends – we are there for each other and we get to exercise.”

Encima said that the group continues to be an inspiration for many, and she hopes that it continues to inspire children and others in the neighborhood to be healthy and safe.

“If we set our minds to something, we can accomplish it,” Perez said.

The group meets at Stiern Park on weekday mornings – the earlier hours usually beat the summertime heat – get some stretching and other exercise routines in, then off they go into the surrounding neighborhood streets.

And though they might not have secret identities nor make quick-changes into a Super Hero outfit while in a phone booth, the members of the Greenfield Walking Group are making a change for the better.

A healthier lifestyle and a safer neighborhood – how much more “super” does it get than that?

Greenfield Walking Group

- Meets from 8 to 9:30 a.m., Monday through Friday
- Stiern Park, 5201 Monitor St.
- Details, call 205-3743.