

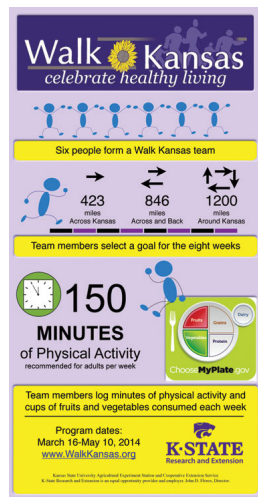
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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

Spring is officially a little less than a month away, and that traditionally means warmer weather.

The higher temperatures likely mean more people getting outdoors having fun, and this gives many a the opportunity to get in a little exercise.



Seward County's K-State Research and Extension office is giving everyone a little encouragement to get outdoors with its annual Walk Kansas event, and registration has started for the program scheduled to start March 16.

Walk Kansas is a team-based program that will help people lead a healthier life by being more active, making better nutrition choices and learning positive ways to deal with stress.

Co-workers, family members, friends and neighbors can form teams of six people. Each team will choose one of these challenges to work toward the eight-week program:

- Challenge 1 – Each participant reaches the minimum goal for physical activity – two and a half hours of moderate or vigorous activity per week. Collectively, the team would walk 423 miles, which is the distance across the state of Kansas;
- Challenge 2 – Each participant logs five hours of moderate/vigorous activity per week. Collectively, the team would walk 846 miles, the distance across the state and back; or
- Challenge 3 – Each participant logs six hours of moderate activity per week. Collectively, the team would walk 1,200 miles, which is the distance around the perimeter of the state.

Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Kathy Bloom said vigorous activity can include a variety of activities.

“Anything from vacuuming to yard work to stairs to a serious workout with zumba or any of the new workouts they have now,” she said. “Anything counts, and it can be really high level a moderate level.”

Bloom said this is the beauty of Walk Kansas.

“It can be for anyone at any activity level, whether you’re pretty sedentary and don’t get off the couch much or you work out for hours every day,” she said. “There’s something for everybody.”

Bloom said registration and participant materials are online at www.seward.ksu.edu, and hard copies are available at the Extension office at 1081 Stadium Road, across from the Activity Center.

"More forms are available in Spanish," she said. "We've always had a few. We're trying to add a few more each year. I think the greatest thing is the ability to register themselves online. That'll save them a trip down here. They need to go ahead and bring their money or send it for their registration fee."

T-shirts are also available for participants, according to Bloom.

"In the past, we've always had a Walk Kansas T-shirt, and it's been a different color each year," she said. "This year, we have several different options. We have a long sleeve T-shirt, a polo shirt, a sweat shirt, performance shirt and children's sizes. We had a lot of different shirt options. It's tropical blue. We usually have the dark purple, and there's also the charcoal gray."

Though Walk Kansas itself officially starts March 16, Bloom said participants can get a start a day early with Liberal Parks and Rec's Leprechaun Challenge 5K Walk/Run.

"They can start a day early if they participate in that," she said.

The Leprechaun Challenge will take place at 1:30 p.m. March 15 starting at Willow Tree Golf Course. Registration is \$5, and a 5K is equal to a little more than three miles, giving Walk Kansas participants a good head start on their walking goals.

Bloom said activities between the kick off of Walk Kansas and its finale on May 10 have been considered, but most likely, teams will simply track their miles as they try to reach their goals.

"In the past, we did what's called Walkin' Wednesdays," she said. "We would meet at the park and walk, but people kind of just preferred to walk on their own. We did that at noon one year. It's just such a busy time. We haven't really added any other events. We always have the celebration at the end for all of those who've met their goals. Their names are put in a hat, and we draw for all kinds of fun prizes. Everyone goes home with a great little snack."

Bloom said the local Walk Kansas event has been growing for a few years now.

"We usually have around 20 teams," she said. "We had more than 30 teams last year. It's fun. We really encourage different businesses to challenge each other or civic organizations or different schools to challenge each other, neighborhoods. We have different teams within businesses that challenge each other. We've had that in banks. Pizza Hut did that one year."

Participants must be registered by March 14.

"We've done a really good job of getting everything up on the Web site," Bloom said. "All the information they need is on our Web site, which is seward.ksu.edu and also on the Walk Kansas Web site."

Walk Kansas participants will also get a weekly newsletter, which Bloom said likely will also be available on the Extension's Facebook page at "Seward County Ks 4-H & Extension."

Bloom said changing a few choices each day can help create a healthier lifestyle.

"What a huge impact physical activity and healthy eating can have on your health," she said. "Small steps can bring big rewards, and participating in Walk Kansas could be the motivation you need to get started."

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