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Dale Moss | Man climbs mountains to help kids

Ind. chaplin's treks raise funds to battle childhood obesity, heighten awareness

By Dale Moss • The Courier-Journal • January 11, 2011

SALEM — Too many children keep eating more and exercising less. So Walter "Wally" Glover of Columbus, Ind., keeps climbing the world's summits.

Glover is now in Australia, headed up 7,310-foot Mount Kosciuszko. In step, Sherry Schmidt and Jackie Kramer begin to head up an attack on childhood obesity at hospitals in Bedford and Salem.

Glover, a Bedford native, climbs to raise money for their program, which encourages kids to get off the couch and away from junk food.

"If that old geezer with the gray hair can do this ...," Glover said before the trip.

Glover is the chaplain at St. Vincent Salem Hospital as well at Bedford's St. Vincent Dunn Hospital, and his climb is drawing sponsorships to fuel new campaigns at both. He already has raised \$40,000 on earlier climbs for other St. Vincent hospitals.

Glover meshes with fitness as he does with prayer. At 62, he weighs the same as in high school. He trains 120 miles per month, not simply walking or jogging but climbing any and every hill he can find while carrying a 40-pound backpack and wearing boots. One mile per day must be a vertical mile, by the way.

Could most students at Salem High handle a vertical mile any day?

Glover's determination cannot be questioned. Neither can the urgency of the cause. Kramer, a dietitian, sees children on blood-pressure pills

by the time they learn to read and write. More and more are diabetic, their parents wrongly resigned that healthy foods are too pricey or too much hassle.

"There's definitely a need," Kramer said of the aid.

Schmidt, a pediatric nurse practitioner, said medication is not necessarily the best answer. Wellness takes work. Right is not always easy. It's a challenge to persuade people they should eat to live, not live to eat. "If their clothes get a little tight, they get new ones," Schmidt said.

Their program borrows from one offered at the Peyton Manning Children's Hospital at St. Vincent in Indianapolis. The goal is less to lose weight than to find confidence. Numbers improve mostly when self-image does. "If we look at actual pounds lost, we'll probably be disappointed," Schmidt said, saying the hope is to change behaviors.

Kramer expects to include families in the program, and encourage them to exercise and eat better together. Yet Schmidt stressed that no two solutions may be precisely alike because problems aren't. Kramer and Schmidt will monitor progress and suggest goals, as well as teach an 18-lesson course.

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"It's healthy eating, it's exercise," Kramer said. "It's making them feel better."

"We're just a small part in the whole change that's got to happen," Schmidt said.

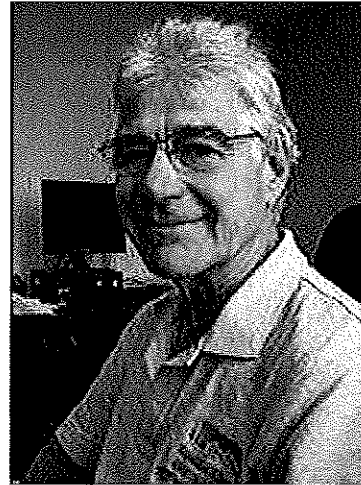
Participation in the program is voluntary. The cost is little if any — that's where Glover comes in.

He had an aunt devoted to wellness well before wellness was cool. Being active was being normal, thank goodness. Glover's family tree includes a branch prone to heart problems. Staying young at heart only makes all the more sense.

But climbing mountains seems, well, over the top. Glover said a persistent voice nudged him first to Mount Everest, then to Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Elbrus. Those are three of the world's seven summits — the highest mountains on each of the continents — and he aims to reach all seven.

He cannot raise too much money to turn the tide of childhood obesity. "It's going to take some time for this to happen," Glover said. "But we can have some early victories."

Dale Moss' column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Reach him at (812) 949-4026 or dross@courier-journal.com. Comment on this column, and read his blog and previous columns, at www.courier-journal.com/moss.



Walter "Wally" Glover, climbing a mountain on behalf of childhood obesity. (photo by Dale Moss)

HOW TO HELP

To help sponsor Glover's climb, send checks made to St. Vincent Salem Hospital – Trek 4 Kids to 911 N. Shelby Street, Salem, IN, 47167. You can call the hospital at (812) 883-5881.

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