

HER GOAL: THIN BY 30

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To a 305-pound Bobbi Jo Blunk, losing weight was as simple as waking up in the morning.

Actually, it was one morning in particular, a few days after her 29th birthday.

"I woke up one day and decided that I didn't want to be this way any more," said the mother of four. "I was going to be turning 30 in a year and I decided that by the time I turned 30 I wanted to have a different me. So I had a motto then that was 'Thin By 30' and started."

That was in 2006. By her self-appointed deadline she had dropped from a size 26 dress to a 14. These days, the participant of the month in the Lucas County Million Pound Challenge weighs about 140 pounds.

The weight-loss challenge is a county-wide collective effort to shed one million pounds before the end of the year while educating residents about healthy eating and weight-loss strategies.

Mrs. Blunk, now 32, had wanted to lose weight before but never with lasting results. She thought about the Atkins Diet but liked bread too much. Exercise was hard, so she stopped. And she couldn't figure out how to say no to sweets.

"I don't want to say I was comfortable that way, but it was just easier to stay that way than to put forth the effort to change," she said.

After she woke up that one day and made a concrete decision to change, however, Mrs. Blunk forced herself to stick with it. The first thing the South Toledo woman did was quit drinking pop altogether, down from three or four cans a day. Two weeks later she cut out greasy fast foods and sweets and started exercising to videos every day at home. Eventually her routine grew to include step aerobics, Tae Bo, and weight training, but it wasn't easy.

"Exercise was terrible. I hated it. For the first two weeks, I dreaded putting on the tennis shoes. I dreaded putting on the clothes," she said. "But after two weeks of doing it daily, my body started wanting it."

Within a month, Mrs. Blunk had lost 30 pounds.

"It made me want to go more," she said. "I went to the store and I bought an outfit that was a size smaller than what I was wearing, hung that up in my room ... and said, 'OK, I'm going to get in that outfit.' And then once I fit into that outfit.

I went and bought another size smaller and hung that up and said, 'I'm going to get into that outfit.' On and on and on and down."

The vast majority of her weight came off before Mrs. Blunk, an X-ray technician at Mercy St. Charles Hospital in Oregon, joined the Million Pound Challenge, but she decided to participate anyway at the suggestion of her supervisor at work, Julie Wilburn.

"I thought it would be a good inspiration for people to see that there are people, they work hard, they stick to it," Mrs. Wilburn said. "It doesn't happen overnight, and you fall off but you get right back on. I think she's a good inspiration for people."

With less weight came more confidence and energy. There were other bonuses too, according to Mrs. Wilburn.



Million-Pound Challenge winner Bobbi Jo Blunk exercises to a 'Budokon' workout video. (THE BLADE/LORI KING)

"The biggest thing for me is not just the energy level, but she had a hard time breathing when she was that big," she said. "It's totally gone now. She's so much healthier."

Linda Baker said she's proud of her daughter's dedication and her grandchildren are too.

"They'll come to me and say, 'I can put my arms around my mom, all the way around her now. I can hug her now.' I know it makes them happy too."

As the Million Pound Challenge participant of the month, Mrs. Blunk receives a number of items, including a \$50 gift certificate to the Blarney Irish Pub & Grill and a year-long Max Membership to the YMCA & JCC of Greater Toledo. Bowling Green State University donated four football tickets to its Nov. 20 game against the University of Akron as well.

The Blade is cosponsoring the challenge, which was the brainchild of Lucas County Commissioner Ben Konop. Enrollees may track their weight in a private journal on The Blade's Web site at toledoblade.com/challenge.

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