



# City of Gaithersburg

*A Healthiest Maryland Businesses Success Story*

## Weight Loss Challenge: Big Results

In October 2011, the City of Gaithersburg announced a 'Biggest Loser Challenge' during its annual Employee Wellness Day celebration.

The challenge would last 12 weeks, from November 21, 2011 to February 8, 2012—encompassing three of the biggest chow-down days of the year:

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Super Bowl Sunday.

### **Rules of the Game**

The challenge was open to all full-time employees, for a \$10 participation fee. All fees collected went into the 'Challenge Fund.' This fund paid out 50 cents for each pound lost, but employees who gained had to pay in 50 cents per pound. Employees weighed in every Wednesday. Employees who missed a weigh-in paid a \$2 fee



Sherry Lewis was the City of Gaithersburg's Biggest Loser in their first ever Biggest Loser Challenge. Sherry lost 13.5% of her starting weight!

to the fund.

The 43 participants competed as teams of 4 or 5, as well as on an individual level. Success was measured not by pounds lost, but by percentage of total body weight lost. Each week, the winning team was announced via a spreadsheet sent to all participants. The spreadsheet included each team, and showed the team's total combined lost pounds, as well as percentage of total weight lost. The

winning team was highlighted and announced. To earn the bragging rights of a weekly team win was a great incentive. The biggest Loser Challenge boosted employee morale, brought about friendly competition, a little bit of 'trash talk,' and even a few donut delivery sabotages!

Each month a group meeting was held for all Challenge participants. The meetings provided each participant with individual support, as

## City of Gaithersburg at a Glance:

- **Type of Business:**  
Local government
- **Location:**  
Gaithersburg, MD
- **How Long in Business:**  
135 years
- **Number of Employees:**  
272 (FTE)
- **What worked:**  
Making weight loss fun and competitive with individual and team rewards; using feedback from participants to improve future weight loss challenges



**Gaithersburg**  
A CHARACTER COUNTS! CITY

well as input on what was or wasn't working for others. Different weight loss tools and apps were introduced and discussed and informative handouts were distributed. Challenge fund rewards incentives were also distributed at the meetings.

### **Wrapping it up**

At the end of the Challenge, a wrap-up meeting was held to recognize the individual winner and the winning team. The individual winner, Sherry Lewis from the Finance department, lost 13.5 percent of her starting weight, tying with another participant for most pounds lost at 27.

The winning team, "A sucRose By Any Other Name" lost a total of 8% of their body weight, or 68.2 pounds. The total weight loss of all participants was 328 pounds. Ms. Lewis won the remaining money in the Challenge Fund (almost \$450!) and she received three paid days off.

Employees were very interested in starting a new Challenge. Veteran Challenge participants shared their thoughts and ideas for how to overcome some obstacles that were faced in the first Challenge. It was decided that weigh-ins could be held Monday through Thursday, to allow for differing schedules. Another change was that Challenge Fund Reward Incentives would be tracked and reconciled at the end of the 12-week period, as opposed to on a weekly basis. Also, participation in the next Challenge was opened to year-

round part-time employees.

In February 2012, an email was sent out to all employees highlighting the Fall Biggest Loser Challenge results and inviting interested employees to join the upcoming Spring Biggest Loser Challenge, which would run from February 27 to May 21, 2012. This Challenge attracted 62 participants, from nearly every department in the City, and four City Council members joined as well.

At the end of the 12-weeks, a total of 607 pounds were lost. The individual winner, JR Smith in Public Works, lost nearly 20% of his total body weight, for a total of 43 pounds. He was awarded three paid days off and was the lucky taker of the Challenge Fund money—\$548! The winning team, The Wolf Pack, lost a total of 11.8 percent or 166.8 pounds, and they received one paid day off. The Spring Challenge produced some really 'big losers.' One participant lost 63 pounds, and several others lost well over 30 pounds.

The third Biggest Loser Challenge was from January 22 to April 12, 2013. This time, the teams represented the facility where each employee works; including teams from City Hall, Public Works, the Police Department, City Council and Parks, Recreation & Culture. Also, the incentive was raised to \$1 per pound lost.

The group of 35 participants lost a total of 448.6 pounds—an

average of 12.8 pounds per participant! The individual winner was Kristen Hux of Parks, Recreation & Culture, who lost 14.2% of her body weight (27 lbs.). She won a Challenge Fund amount of \$125. Parks, Recreation & Culture was also the winning team, and each member was awarded one paid day off.

### **Positive Results**

There were many positive results of the Biggest Loser Challenges. Participants reported lower blood pressure, increased energy and the desire to keep their healthy new lifestyle. A few happy wives even expressed delight with the changes in their husbands! In summary, the benefits were more than just physical. Employee morale and interdepartmental relations improved as well. Weight loss and the accompanying lifestyle changes are a daunting project for anyone, and the Challenges provided a way to keep the process fresh and exciting, as well as retain interest and encourage participation.



**Biggest Loser Challenge participants Marjie Eyler, Gilma Climaco and Doris Stokes enjoying a hike together**