



**COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
MEMORANDUM**

To: Parks & Recreation Commission

From: Amy French, Management Intern

Date: October 28, 2008

Subject: LET'S GO PALO ALTO ACTIVITY CHALLENGE WEBSITE
PROJECT UPDATE AND DEMONSTRATION

The purpose of this informational report is to introduce the pending launch of the “Let’s Go PALO ALTO” activity challenge and fitness tracking website to support community fitness. The project is funded by the City of Palo Alto and the Palo Alto Recreation Foundation. The website is live for a soft launch, for testing the usability of the website between October 28th and November 21. The Commission action requested is to create a Parks and Recreation Commission (P&RC) team to test the site and provide feedback to staff both as a team and as individual participants during the soft launch period. Further, staff requests that the P&RC promote the program and website as registered participants, spreading the word about the site and its challenges and the benefits of using the site, and providing input on the long term use of the site and program to promote and support community fitness as we approach and after the official launch in late November 2008. Input on marketing the program is also welcome.

BACKGROUND

The Parks and Recreation Commission (P&RC) has established a “Culture of Fitness” subcommittee. The mission of the subcommittee is to “encourage the citizens and employees of Palo Alto to embrace a healthier lifestyle through increased physical activity.” This is consistent with a statewide action plan that cites government agencies’ responsibility to lead communities toward health and wellness. The action plan was prepared by the California Park and Recreation Society (CPRS) and the National Alliance for Youth Sports. In addition, the Climate Crisis and Palo Alto’s Climate Action Plan carbon emission reduction goals have brought about a need for every individual to be less reliant on single occupant vehicle trips in favor of alternative transportation, such as walking and bicycling, to daily activities and events.

Working toward implementation of health and fitness goals, and in partnership with the Palo Alto Recreation Foundation (PARF), staff has created an activity challenge website

accessed via www.letsGOPaloAlto.com and www.letsGOPaloAlto.org. The website has been set up as a non-city website. The domain names are reserved for five years and will eventually be linked to the City of Palo Alto website. Links to Let's Go Palo Alto on the City's website will be on the Community Services Department homepage and other relevant locations. The Let's Go PALO ALTO website will be featured in the upcoming Enjoy catalog on an entire page as shown on Attachment A.

The site has been collaboratively designed with PARF member Ann Eddington, who has graphic and web design expertise. PARF committed to funding the activity challenge website and Core Health Technologies Inc. (CoreHealth) entered into a contract with PARF to establish and host the website. A separate contract in a smaller amount is underway with the City of Palo Alto for additional features that were considered important to the program's success. An annual funding commitment is required to maintain the website and product features, as well as the cost of any prizes to be awarded in drawings. Costs are anticipated to be recovered in part through participant registration donations and eventual sponsorships from interested partners.

Staff selected the Core Community Active Community website system run by CoreHealth after researching several programs and companies. Core Health is a Canadian company. Palo Alto uses another Canadian company to run the Class registration software for Enjoy Online programs and activities. Many Canadian and United States government agencies are using the system to combat obesity and inspire greater citizen participation in fitness and walking programs.

This report describes the features of the activity challenge website. Staff will present the new website to the P&RC during the public hearing to demonstrate the product features.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The emphasis of the program is the combination of getting people active and keeping their interest in being active for the long term. The program helps people find trails and trail information, includes interactive challenges to get friends, coworkers and family involved, and is designed to inspire activity every day. Registered participants would use the website to challenge other teams and individual participants in fun, friendly competitions. Participants, upon registering, will be asked for a suggested donation via the Pay Pal system to support and improve the Let's Go PALO ALTO program. Typically, nominal fees help to fund "rewards" for success and enhancement of the program's website features and provide additional motivation for participants.

The website provides motivational activity challenges, activity tracking, public routes using Google mapping software, and individual routes as mapped by participants for their use. These are described further below. The program also includes a Testimonial module allowing participants to upload photos and inspirational testimonials, a Motivation module where participants can send an e-card to invite someone to participate in a challenge and a Reports module where a participant can view team history on a challenge and a 60-day individual history. Finally, a tutorial is provided to aid the participant in navigating the website and setting up individual routes using the program.

Prizes will be offered as incentives through drawings that participants will be automatically entered into at a certain number of steps. These prizes, such as

pedometers, will be distributed by website administrators at Lucie Stern Community Center. In addition, T-shirts will soon be available to purchase at all recreation centers in Palo Alto, which will further advertise the program to encourage the community to stay active.

The website includes local photos showing active people, taken by CSD staff. These photos can be changed by staff as may be decided to reflect seasons or refresh the look of the website. Similarly, the text that was composed by staff can and will be changed as needed to reflect the latest challenges or other community fitness news. Commissioners' input on the selected or future images and text is welcome.

Activity Challenges and Activity Tracker

An activity challenge is a motivational tool that provides interactive fun for participants who may wish to challenge themselves on an individual basis or as part of a team. Registered participants can track their daily activities using an activity tracker that converts a variety of physical activity types into steps and miles traveled. The steps walked will be automatically plotted as “virtual progress” along the mapped routes of the challenges the participant has joined. The mapping software is Google software that allows street views, satellite views, hybrid views or topographical views, and the challenge maps reflect the selected view.

An example of an activity challenge is a virtual race currently underway from British Columbia to Panama City, Panama. Teams of ten participants select a team name and captain and sign up individually. If all ten participants were to log in at least 10,000 steps per day, the team would reach Panama City within three months. Each participant logs individual activities or actual steps. A range of activities are converted variably into steps on this program so that when a participant enters an activity, they see how many steps it converts to on the screen. The screen map shows where each team is located on the route to Panama City with a marker, so participants can check the group's position against other teams in the race and see the total steps each team has accumulated.

There are four types of activity challenges:

1. Team challenges – set up by City of Palo Alto;
2. Optional team challenges – groups of participants can challenge other Groups;
3. Individual challenges (e.g. Mayor's challenge); and
4. Optional individual side challenges – individuals challenge each other.

Palo Alto's First Activity Challenges

Staff has established three activity challenges for the website launch. The first is called “Jim's Challenge” and is an Individual challenge every registered participant is automatically included in. This challenge will be changed out every few months with new, actual, local pedestrian routes mapped on the site for users to view and explore. Participants can see their own progress completing the route but are not enabled to see others' progress.

The second challenge is called “Parks and Recreation Commission Challenge” and staff has chosen, on your behalf, the San Francisco Bay Trail route which covers approximately 288 miles of trails alongside the bay. This challenge will be for teams that

choose to register and will run through March 2009. Teams of city staff members in the Community Services Department (CSD) have already begun to form and motivate each other to go on group walks in advance of the website launch. Staff intends to partner with Commissioners to encourage people to register as participants and join the challenge. Teams will be able to see their group's progress, shown as average steps per team member along the challenge route as team members individually track daily activities.

The third challenge is the "Palo Alto Community Challenge" and staff has chosen a virtual "Coast to Coast" route that allows the total steps of all registered participants to add up to a trip across the United States. All registered participants will be automatically included in this community challenge and will be able to see how Palo Alto is doing as a group toward becoming a healthier community.

Future challenges could borrow from other similar Core Health websites to include a Route 66 challenge, an East Coast challenge, a Fit Families challenge, and an Ocean Race from California to Hawaii requiring more than 5 million steps.

Public and Private Routes

The website features "Public Routes" and "My Routes". Public Routes provide actual routes with associated mileage using Google Maps software. My Routes is intended for the individual participant to create custom routes such as a daily morning, lunchtime, or evening walks, a paper route, or a weekend favorite walk. The website allows CSD assigned website administrators to map public routes for the benefit of all participants.

CSD staff recently formed a team "Lucie Stern Walkers" and walked on several short public walk routes (two to three miles) to downtown during lunchtime along routes mapped and shared using the same route Google mapping system as utilized on the new website. The lunchtime routes have intentionally passed by parks and healthy take-out restaurants. CSD staff plan to encourage participation by City Hall employees in lunchtime walks that will be displayed as public routes on the website. Other areas of town will be mapped as public walk and run routes to motivate participants, including city employees working at other locations.

DISCUSSION

In addition to publishing the website in the Winter Enjoy recreation catalogue, the following marketing techniques have been identified by other agencies as prompting greater registration in an activity challenge site:

- A Mayor's challenge – Sponsorship on this level results in news and radio time to help you capture a large audience. Large institutions like hospitals and public offices often join, resulting in a tremendous growth spurt.
- News releases – A well developed announcement gets news and radio time.
- Corporate sponsorships – Often a good source of prizes, publicity, and members.
- Recreation brochure – Reaches people that are actively seeking fitness options.

- Posters – Good for targeting high need areas within a community.
- Health fairs – Target people that are receptive to better living.
- Clubs and Associations – A strong inroad into huge influential populations, often results in club and workplace memberships.
- Doctor’s offices – The use of green prescriptions targets people that can most benefit from participation in wellness programs.
- Integration with Recreation – If people that already take part in Recreation program fitness options are offered a chance for fun competition, you can capture a large audience. This works well when combined with a workplace or fit families’ concept. It’s a good way to tap your existing client base and find advocates in the community to help you further promote fitness in the city.

To date, no community working with Core Health has had to implement more than two or three of the techniques above to achieve their registration targets.

Other local nonprofits may wish to join the City in this effort (such as Palo Alto Medical Foundation) to participate in a weight loss challenge program and connect to the issuance of “green prescriptions”. Staff has not yet approached other non-profit entities to determine their potential level(s) of support to fund increased participation and enhanced website features over time. As noted, CSD staff enabled as website managers created the initial challenges and rewards program for getting and staying active. Staff can work with partners to create future challenges. Staff is also interested in partnering with the Palo Alto Unified School District to set up a school grade level challenge district wide.

Core Health Online System

The system has been relatively easy to implement and will be sustained with only limited city resources. CSD staff recently received training as website administrators, so that they can map public routes, upload challenges, answer questions, and assist participants as needed. No Information Technology (IT) department support from the City of Palo Alto has been needed leading up to the website launch and ongoing IT support will not be required – CoreHealth will handle the technical issues and is compensated through the annual fee.

The Core Health system can also include wellness journaling as well as information and tracking of weight loss, nutrition and hydration, among other features. However, these other modules have not been purchased for Let’s Go Palo Alto. The modules could be added in the future with additional funding. These modules include Nutrition (tracking how many of the 8 recommended fruits and vegetables were eaten each day for a week), Hydration (tracking how many of 8 recommended glasses of water each day for a week), Passport (tracking participant’s selected daily accomplishments) and Whole Body Passport (tracking daily successes in the categories of body, family and friends, home, mind, healthy eating, neighborhood and community, spirit.)

Participation Goals

The participation levels funded to date are for 1,500 users or participants. The contracts include an annual review and update of the website to remain current with technology.

It is estimated that by the end of first year, approximately 2% of the City's 63,000 residents could be participating in the program (about 1,260 people by end of 2009). With a growth rate anticipated at approximately 2% per year, there could very well be 3,780 participants enrolled by the end of the third year (2012). This participation estimate is based on Planning estimate for the City's population by 2010 (63,424 versus the Associate of Bay Area Government's estimate of 64,500).

Overall Program Success

A case study summarizing the program is provided as Attachment B (regarding Kelowna, British Columbia). It indicates that a majority of people who join the program will be active in the program for six months or more, and that having a participant paid user fee actually contributed to the continued participation. Kelowna, a city of approximately 100,000 people, has a site called kickstartkelowna.ca. This website has been online for 2 years, 2 months. At 2 years, 15 days old, the site had 6,789 registrants. The percentage of population using the service had grown from 1.8% after 1 year, to 3.7% in year two, to 6.2% two weeks into year three.

A few of the key aspects that help the program work are:

- a) It's fun! People are more apt to participate in a friendly competition if asked, as opposed to committing to an exercise program. Combining a challenge with trails information gives participants motivation and a means to win, so they get more active.
- b) It's socially marketable. It's pretty hard for a friend or coworker to suggest someone exercise, but they can invite them into competition and inspire them without social risk. It's more fun than a simple invitation to go for a walk... and the behavior lasts longer.
- c) Competition is addictive. This keeps people working hard until exercise starts to feel good, at which time competition inspires even greater activity.
- d) This is one of few ways to combat obesity with a limited budget. Once a site is set up, the City's cost for citizens to join into a year of seasonal walking and fitness challenges is only 25 cents per person.
- e) It's highly educational. A website will provide the City with a communication point that thousands of participants view regularly. This space will be used to educate and inspire. People learn about new walking and hiking opportunities, clubs, associations, and other resources that help them become and remain active.

Other case studies include the activity challenge website for British Columbia, a site that has been running two years with approximately 25,000 participants (about .6% of that province's residents). Another Canadian agency, the city of New West (population 57,000), has a challenge program called New West Walks. New West was surprised to have five times the participation that had been anticipated within the first year. The "Lighten Up Louisiana" program now has around 12,000 participants (.3% of state's population). That site is sponsored by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Several of these websites also have a weight loss challenge.

Joining Incentives and Participant Fees

Many cities charge participant fees ranging from \$10 to \$25 dollars, allowing for the cost of prizes and for subsidized or waived fees for other participants such as school children. Prizes for joining with a suggested donation could include free pedometers or a guided

hike. Drawing prizes for attaining a specified goal could be a Let's Go PALO ALTO t-shirt. Staff is in the process of determining an appropriate fee amount based upon anticipated participation, to ensure the program is ultimately a cost recovery program after the first year. In the meantime, the suggested donation is \$15.00. If 234 registrants paid \$15, the PARF cost would be paid for. Another 173 participants paying \$15 would pay the City's portion of the annual fee to maintain the website. Staff is particularly interested in having a subsidized or free program for PAUSD school children and teens to help combat the phenomenon of childhood obesity and establish lifelong activity habits early on.

Technical Support

Technical support for the website maintenance is included in the contract. CSD support staff and website administrators would handle calls related to the programs on the site. The first tier support would be provided by City support staff, estimated at about one call per week per 500 participants (Palo Alto estimates would yield approximately 2.6 calls per week in the first year). The second tier of support would be provided by CoreHealth staff, unlimited in the number of calls but estimated to be approximately one call per week per 500 members (Palo Alto estimates would yield about 2.5 calls per week the first year, 8 calls per week the third year). Core Health sales staff reports that of the 25,000 people registered in BC, there have been about 30 support calls to the government agency per week over the last two years (around 1 call per 1,000 registered participants).

ALTERNATIVES

As noted, the project's official launch date will coincide with the Winter Enjoy Catalog rollout in the last week of November .

Websites

Staff had considered other websites including:

- (1) the United States' Presidential Challenge website (president'schallenge.org) which is free but it advocates counting the number of minutes, without providing for intensity levels and offers no prizes for success. The number of minutes, 30 minutes per day, represents only one half of doctor-recommended daily exercise; and
- (2) americaonthemove.org, which has no reporting mechanism, no trail routes, no interactive mapping and participants cannot track their progress so there is no way to tell whether or not it is working.

Additional Modules

In the future, with commensurate funding, the City may choose to add additional website modules including a weight loss challenge (\$625 per year), a kids challenge fitness tracker that uses a soccer balls graph (\$625 per year). Nutrition Challenge and Journals would add another \$ 625 per year. Health Tips would add another \$1,250 per year. The nutrition challenge and journals would add the nutrition tracker (8 fruits and veggies per day) and hydration tracker (8 glasses of water per day) and the passport function

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Winter Enjoy Catalog Page
- B. Summary of Case Study Kelowna, B.C. KickStart program

COURTESY COPIES

Palo Alto Recreation Foundation

Friends of the Palo Alto Parks

Friends of the Foothills

Save the Bay

PAUSD

Avenidas

YMCA

Campus for Jewish Life

Golf Advisory Committee

Recreation Partners Clubs

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