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## **OVERWEIGHT PARTICIPANTS FIND GOALS THROUGH MARATHON EVENTS**

Participants in the 2011 ING Miami Marathon and Half-Marathon®, which will be held January 30 through the streets of downtown Miami, Miami Beach and Coconut Grove, each have their own reasons for running in the race. For some, running is a major element of their daily lifestyle. For others, completing a race is the fulfillment of a personal goal.

Dawn Walton's moment of decision came as she was sitting in her son's elementary classroom and felt the chair break beneath her 404 pounds.

"I got mad," said Walton, a 35-year-old third grade special needs teacher. "I literally got mad. That's when I got to the breaking point."

Today, Walton is in final preparation for the 2011 ING Miami Marathon and Half-Marathon®. She has shed 234 pounds in the past three years and is down to 170. She doesn't face the embarrassing situations she once did, and she can do things she never dreamed of doing.

Walton will be among a group of 13 runners and walkers participating in the Half-Marathon alongside national fitness guru Donna Richardson-Joyner, the star of more than 25 award-winning exercise videos. Richardson-Joyner's current "Body Gospel" workout program from Beach Body, a faith-based fitness and nutrition program that advocates healthy and spirit-filled living, has helped each individual find a path to a healthier lifestyle. Being able to complete the half-marathon over the picturesque Miami course will be the fulfillment of their training and hard work.

At one time, Walton couldn't take her son to Disney World without asking a stranger to ride on the rides with him. At the front gate, she could see his face intently wondering if she would be able to squeeze through the turnstile. She had a handicapped sticker on her car because walking the short distance from the grocery store to her car was a daunting task. And the Largo, Florida resident dropped out of her master's degree program because she couldn't fit into the classroom chairs. Arranging for a special chair was too embarrassing.

"I was always the fat, funny friend," says Walton, who at one time tried surgery, lost 40 pounds and then gained 80 more. "I thought there was never going to be a day when I could walk into the mall and buy an outfit."

Walton met Richardson-Joyner, the wife of nationally-syndicated radio talk show host Tom Joyner, at one of his "Family Reunion" appearances. Walton remembered the fitness expert from a praise and worship workout CD and approached her for help.

"She took me under her wing," says Walton of the woman known for her "Buns of Steel" and "Sweating in the Spirit" exercise videos. "She would call me every couple of months and check up on me. She was kind of a person to answer to. And the spiritual part of her program appealed to me."

Walton tries to work out at least an hour a day and walks in addition to that. She also removed most carbohydrates from her diet and no longer eats fast food.

"I was a carb junkie. It was nothing to have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich before bed. I had to change that. Now I eat almonds, grapes, berries," she said. "I would go to multiple fast food places. My life revolved around fast food. I would calculate my route to work based on where I would stop. I was spending \$55 to \$60 a week (M-F) on fast food. Now, I can't tell you the last time I had a McDonald's french fry."

Walton also changed the times she ate – cutting herself off at 7 pm – where in the past she would eat well into the night and not care about the time. She eats 3-4 small meals a day now. She starts off breakfast with a protein shake, has some lunch meat squares late morning, a salad mid-afternoon and then dinner.

"After I lost so much weight I felt something hard in my chest area," Walton said. "I thought I had a lump so I went to the doctor. He said 'no honey that's your rib cage'. I was so embarrassed. I asked him if he was going to charge me the co-pay."

When Richardson-Joyner introduced the idea of participating in the ING Miami Marathon, Walton was in right away. She has been walking extensively since November and is up to eight miles in a session. The half-marathon distance of 13.1 miles will be her target on race day.

"I had been talking about goals and I had wanted to do something like this," she says. "I said, 'Oh my gosh. I've got to be a part of it.'"

"From where I've come from, to actually say I'm going to be in a marathon is really huge. It gives me chills just to think about it."

With childhood obesity on the rise (1 in 3 children in poverty is at risk for obesity), Richardson-Joyner is also helping lead the "Let's Move" campaign created by First Lady Michelle Obama to try to combat the epidemic that has risen at an alarming rate since the 1970s. She has served on the board of the President's Council of Fitness, Sports and Nutrition under both the Bush and Obama administrations.

"I just want to bless the people I'm working with," says Richardson-Joyner, who ran in last year's Miami Marathon and fell in love with the South Florida race. "These people have been ridiculed in public. They have had problems with simple tasks like tying their shoes. This is like a family buddy system. You make better choices and change how you think. You have to have tenacity to reach these goals."

The ING Miami Marathon and Half-Marathon® continues to work to bring attention to healthy lifestyles.

More than 5,000 Miami-Dade County middle school students are participating in the ING Run for Something Better Program in which they will culminate a 15-week, 25-mile fitness program by completing the final 1.2 miles on race day. Richardson-Joyner will also be running with them.

The Nissan Health & Fitness Expo presented by The Miami Herald is a prominent Race-weekend event (Jan. 28 & 29) that carries the "healthy lifestyle" theme. Many of the Expo's exhibitors are showcasing fitness and nutrition products to 40,000 members of the running community who are expected to attend the second annual event at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

While the Obama administration is preaching a healthy lifestyle at the national level, Richardson-Joyner's "Body Gospel" is helping combat the problem at a grassroots level.

More than 72 million adults in the U.S. are obese, and Enrice Jones and Pete Trevino were among them. After growing tired of challenges like fitting into airline and movie seats, not being able to engage in routine activities with their children, and shortness of breath, they too decided it was time for a change.

For Jones, it meant dropping nearly 200 pounds and Trevino needed to lose 80.

"I've been overweight pretty much all of my life, from age four all the way to my heaviest at the beginning of 2010," says Jones, who reached 380 pounds before she decided to get serious about her weight. "One day it just clicked. I was relying on my 12-year-old son to help out with my 2-year-old daughter. It wasn't just what I couldn't do. It was about having a daughter and being a role model. I needed to change."

After embracing the "Body Gospel" program, the 37-year-old New Orleans native has seen 80 pounds tumble off. Her goal: to lose 120 more, or to fit into a size 12, whichever comes first.

Trevino, a 30-year-old Dallas resident, has already used the Body Gospel program to drop 20 pounds from the 286 that he once carried on his 6-foot frame.

"I had lost weight at one time in my life, but I gained it all back and then I hit that wall," he said. "I thought, 'I have to do something about this.'"

The father of two changed his diet, quit smoking and set goals for exercising. He is enjoying the challenge that training for the ING Miami Half Marathon brings. The bigger goal, however, is to reduce his weight to 200 pounds.

"I know I can get there," he says. "It has definitely been a lifestyle transformation."

Walton went back to college and got that master's degree. She can accompany her son on rides at Disney World. She is engaged.

"It's been an amazing journey," she says. "It's transformed me into a different person."