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Lighten Up East Texas

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Cell phone technology makes the robo-call part of daily life. You have probably received calls from phone numbers that you did not recognize, but your intuition encouraged you to answer it anyway...not knowing if it may be a long lost relative or a once-in-a-lifetime job offer. Maybe that unexpected phone call is to contact the winner of a contest that you entered, and a representative is calling to learn if you wish to claim your prize. When an unknown phone number appears on your phone, maybe you are the type of person who waits to see if the person leaves a voicemail, so that the lack of a voicemail will reassure you that an actual person did not intend to call you. But what would you do if an actual person from a real contest calls you to inform you that you are one of the randomly selected winners, but you let their call go to voicemail! This situation occurred on the evening of the Grand Prize Drawings of the 7th Annual Lighten Up East Texas regional weight loss challenge.

Meika Fallon works as the assistant to the principal of the Caldwell Arts Academy in Tyler and was one of the 200+ Tyler Independent School District employees who wanted to become a healthier version of themselves. "I never win anything, and I honestly did not think I was going to win as an entrant of Lighten Up East Texas, but I did not sign

up because I wanted the chance to win," said Meika. "My main reason to enter was to stay healthy so that I can keep up with my kids. I am now a stronger person, physically and psychologically, and I am going to continue my new lifestyle, even after the end of Lighten Up East Texas."

Meika participated in Lighten Up East Texas for the first time and was strongly encouraged to be the leader of her weight loss team that included several coworkers at Caldwell. "I then became the person who was making sure my team members worked toward a combined goal of being healthier employees." John Williams, one of the band teachers at the Caldwell Arts Academy, was influenced by seeing his team captain at the gym. "When there is an accountability system involved, it makes things so much easier. When you usually think about weight loss, it is mainly seen as an individual challenge...but when you eat that donut, it's not just about you. It's about the team." John attained the greatest weight loss he has ever personally achieved, which he attributes to the support received from his coworkers.

Common challenges for employees at school districts are the snacks, treats, and meals provided to school



employees by the parents of the children. “Many of our campuses have wonderful PTAs that show their love by baking pastries and related temptations,” says Angela Jennings, an art teacher at Caldwell who was also one of Meika’s teammates for Lighten Up East Texas. “Just having another person who works with you and who also politely says ‘no’ to those temptations really helped.”

Over two-hundred employees of Tyler ISD were a part of the two-thousand-six-hundred-nineteen individuals across East Texas who entered Lighten Up East Texas, the free regional weight loss challenge organized by Fit City Tyler. At each campus, the school nurse was the person who collected the registration forms of each employee who accepted Fit City Tyler’s annual weight loss challenge and who motivates their employees to return for a “weigh-out” during the last week of April. Any company can enter their employees into Lighten Up East Texas, whether you work in an office, at a school, in a factory, in municipal government, in the private sector, for a nonprofit organization, in a clinic, at a hospital or in the hospitality industry. Lighten Up East Texas is available for any company to use a weight scale and to identify a contact person who can collect the registration forms from their employees.

Since its inception in 2013, the combined weight loss of the 8,000 participants who complete the annual event exceeded 61,000 pounds, which is more than the combined weight of the elephants at Tyler’s Caldwell Zoo. Nearly fourteen-hundred participants from over thirty-five counties completed this challenge in 2019 by entering a starting weight and a final weight. Lighten Up East Texas is not a “Biggest Loser” contest. Instead of rewarding whoever loses the most pounds, Lighten Up East Texas awards significant prizes through a random drawing of anyone who loses 5% of their weight.

A person receives an entry for every 5% of weight loss, and Meika actually earned two entries by losing at least 10% of her listed starting weight. On the evening of the Grand Prize Drawings, she was one of the two selected winners of a \$1,000 gift card from the Brookshire’s Grocery Company. This prize allows the winners to purchase groceries, gas, and any store item from any Brookshire’s or Super1

Foods location in East Texas. The generous and gracious donation by one of Fit City Tyler’s dedicated sponsors is a major component for Lighten Up East Texas to complete its seventh year of operation.

Fit City Tyler has generated tremendous community support for Lighten Up East Texas by having businesses and nonprofit agencies become public weighing locations. School campuses (K-12 districts, private schools, and charter schools) have integrated the New Year’s Day theme of overall personal health improvement into the school setting. Employee health and wellness is a focus throughout all levels of Tyler ISD since Lighten Up East Texas participants also included Superintendent Dr. Marty Crawford and members of his administrative team.

“Being healthy and staying healthy is a habit. I have more energy as compared to before I started Lighten Up East Texas in January, and I feel as if something is missing whenever I have consecutive days of not being myself,” continues Meika, “but I don’t beat myself up if I miss a day. I just work to make sure that tomorrow will be better than today.”

The convenience of sedentary living still remains a public health issue, which is why Fit City Tyler has established a variety of health programs. “We’re hoping people make changes in people’s lives,” says George Roberts, CEO of the Northeast Texas Public Health District and a cofounder of Fit City Tyler. “Fit City Tyler is about supporting healthy and active lifestyles for the entire family unit.”

Everyone can make a visible impact on their personal health by participating in the annual Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge. Registration is free and open to anyone over the age of eighteen. Entry opens every January at many public locations, and you can also create a registration location at your worksite. View the full details by visiting FitCityTyler.com and look out for the proverbial phone call when the regional weight loss challenge resumes in January. Meika and her teammates are excellent examples of creating friendly competition between you and your coworkers. They also serve as a reminder that you should probably answer that next call.