

## Working walkers pound the pavement Fitness program gets employees up moving during lunch breaks

By STACY SMITH SEGOVIA  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Charlotte Geist has a vision for the future of Clarksville. Imagine citizens connected to each other not by cell phones, but by sidewalks. Imagine people outside, walking to work, living healthier lives.

Operation FitCommunity is Geist's grand plan. One element of the changing landscape is already in place and growing — a free walking program that encourages half-hour lunchtime walks. Geist has developed partnerships with the Montgomery County Health Department, St. Bethlehem Elementary School and Trane. Past participants include Austin Peay State University and Clarksville Athletic Club.

"The Operation FitCommunity walking program is a good opportunity to encourage fitness in our employees," says Brian Patton, health, safety and environmental manager for Trane. "Operation FitCommunity is a conduit to extend that from Trane to the outside community."

Patton was instrumental in getting Trane on board for the walking program a year ago, then continuing it last fall. The eight-week walking program that began Monday was the third round of walks, and Trane employees have been active participants in them all.

This time around, Trane has partnered with its neighbor, St. Bethlehem Elementary School, to "Walk for Healthy Kids." Trane will donate one dollar to St. Bethlehem's physical education program for every mile walked by a Trane employee in the spring walking session. The money will be used to purchase group physical education equipment and to enhance the school's activity programs.

"We have plans to get the children involved, to symbolize a true partnership," says Terry Workman, principal of St. Bethlehem Elementary School. "This is a win-win situation for all of us. We are taking care of ourselves and taking care of our children at the same time. We're ecstatic."



Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle

Trane employees participate in "Operation FitCommunity," a free, eight-week walking program that encourages half-hour lunchtime walks. Trane has been involved in the fitness program for a year. Other workplaces, such as Montgomery County Health Department, St. Bethlehem Elementary School, Austin Peay State University and Clarksville Athletic Club, have either participated in the past or are currently involved.



Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle

Charlotte Geist, left, leads a group of Trane employees on a short walk. The company workers are participating in Operation FitCommunity, a free walking program created by Geist.

The Trane group, including general manager Doug Apelt, plans to go to the school at least once in the next eight weeks to walk with the children. And Sherrill Travis and Tara Taylor, physical education teachers at St. Bethlehem, will join Trane employees for their noontime walk at least once each week.

"St. Bethlehem Elementary really does appreciate everything Trane is doing for this," Travis says. "We are excited they have the mindset to be physically fit along with our boys and girls."

Patton says because of the "obesity epidemic in America," encouraging activity among children is vitally important to the future health of the country.

"This is good timing that we're able to positively impact the physical education department here," he says.

Geist says Patton not only talks the talk, he walks the walk. He has been a daily participant in the first two rounds of the walking program at Trane and will continue that for the third. She applauds his effort and the efforts of dozens of Trane's 1,500 employees, some of whom use their entire 30-minute lunch period to participate in the walks.

"What I think is neat about this program is it promotes workplace health, it promotes collaborative partnerships, and it promotes physical education in the schools simultaneously," Geist says.

For details on how you or your organization can get involved with future Operation FitCommunity initiatives, call Geist at Balance Point Wellness Services, 338-4723.

**Stacy Smith Segovia can be reached at 245-0237 or by e-mail at [stacysegovia@theleafchronicle.com](mailto:stacysegovia@theleafchronicle.com).**

**Originally published March 29, 2006**



Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle

Trane employees Sandra Bates, left, and Rhonda Teague join Sherrill Travis, right, a physical education instructor at St. Bethlehem Elementary, stretch after a short walk. Trane will donate one dollar to the school for every mile walked by a Trane employee in Operation FitCommunity.