

Fitness, fun and fellowship fuel local man's love of walking

By Kyle Valentini

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George Telle (L) and Dr. Keith Van Epps (R) begin lap 30 of 32 at Crater Stadium at Dover on a crisp January morning. Van Epps walks eight miles most weekdays and logged 1,775 miles in 2011.

Photo by: Kyle Valentini

On a cold January morning, Dr. Keith Van Epps makes his way around the track at Crater Stadium at Dover. Each morning during the week he walks eight miles, 32 times around the track. Some days it might be a little less and other days it might be a little more. In 2011 he logged 1,775 miles. He keeps track of his miles on a calendar.

Van Epps has been walking for years. He used to jog, but finds walking to be a gentler form of fitness for his 73-year-old body. He is not alone most mornings, as people of all ages utilize the track for fitness, for fun, and for fellowship. "There's a pretty regular group of people that come out each morning to walk. We see retired school teachers, business owners, nurses and all sorts of people. I wish we would see more though."

Every other morning Van Epps is joined by George Telle, a longtime friend. "We talk while we walk," said Van Epps.

"We solve the world's problems. Just this morning we were talking about waitresses. We talk about a lot of different things," said Telle. "You put a group of women together and they never stop talking. It's no different for us." Telle is 75 and also lifts weights on the days he does not walk. He does 30 sit-ups every day as a part of his healthy lifestyle.

Having spent his career as a physician, Van Epps has seen what a sedentary lifestyle can lead to. "When I was a med student and resident in the 1960s, it was rare for a person under 50 to have type II diabetes. Now we see this preventable disease in people under the age of 30 and even younger. Our society has

become one where exercise is not a part of our daily lives.”

In the last years of his career as a physician, Van Epps spent much of his time seeing patients at nursing homes. “I could see such a difference in the physical health of my active patients and in their mental health as well. Exercise is good for the body, but it is also good for the mind. Regular exercise can help prevent stress, depression and even Alzheimer’s disease. The cost of health care could be greatly reduced if more people would exercise regularly. Regular exercise can improve the immune system and prevent illness and disease.”

“Until about 15 years ago you never heard how important exercise was for the mind. We knew it helped manage weight and weight loss, but it does so much more,” said Van Epps.

“If you don’t use it, you lose it,” said Telle.

Van Epps and Telle are certainly using it and it shows. “After the age of 40 you lose one percent of your muscle power each year. In order to retain that muscle you must exercise,” said Van Epps.

“Those new to exercise must remember to start out slowly. They shouldn’t try to walk eight miles at first. Twenty minutes of exercise, three times a week, is a good place to start,” said Van Epps. “The most important things you can do to improve health is quit smoking, lose weight and exercise.”

Both Van Epps and Telle mentioned the safety of walking at the track. “There’s a regular gang that comes down here and we are less likely to fall,” said Telle.

“If there is too much snow we walk at Quaker Stadium. There is never an excuse not to walk,” said Van Epps.

“When Doc retired he was like a lost puppy,” said Telle. “He had been doctoring all those years and didn’t know what to do with his time. I suggested he do some volunteering. He’s been volunteering at the food pantry and now he is hooked. It makes you feel good to help others and staying busy is good for us old guys.”

Van Epps, Telle and other dedicated walkers can be found most mornings at the track at Crater Stadium before sunrise.

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