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## Employee Profile: Shannon Ramsey

Anyone who knows Shannon Ramsey knows she has undergone a physical transformation during the past two years. However, you may be surprised to know that overall, she has lost 70 pounds. And every pound was lost without “dieting.” Read our Focus interview with Shannon to find out how her changes in lifestyle led to a complete life makeover.

*Shannon Ramsey is the media and publications specialist with the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service. She has worked in state government since August 2004.*



### When did you decide to make this life change and why?

At the end of January 2005, I went to my doctor for a check-up. She told me that she would like me to lose at least 30 pounds because I was at a high risk for diabetes. I guess I hadn't even realized how much weight I had put on since high school. I didn't even know how much I weighed! When I saw it in black and white, it really was a shock. I had never really worried about my weight or dieted in high school, but maintained a healthy weight and I figured it would be the same in college.

### How did you get started?

My original goal was 30 pounds, but I didn't really make a “plan” because I was afraid I wouldn't stick with it. I knew I wouldn't be able to completely cut out certain types of food or do something like the Atkins diet or something where you usually gain all the weight you lost back when you stop the program. I wanted to make changes I could live with. I was determined not to diet, but to live healthy. I think that's made the biggest difference and why I have been so successful.

### How did you incorporate healthy eating and exercise into your daily routine?

I started small – walking a mile downstairs at work on one of my breaks, taking the stairs instead of the escalators. I started bringing healthier lunches with Sunchips instead of regular chips, carrots, yogurt and a turkey sandwich. I started to see results, which kept me motivated. I wasn't in a rush to lose the weight. As I said before, I wanted to make small lifestyle changes. My doctor said I should lose no more than 1 to 2 pounds a week, so I knew it may be slow-going, but I had made a commitment to myself and I was determined to stick with it.

As I hit plateaus in my weight loss, I slowly started incorporating more healthy activities. I started walking twice a day instead of once, taking the stairs more often and trying to choose healthier snacks. I was going to get married in August 2005, so I had that to look forward to as well. I started eating Special K for breakfast and lunch, and eating fruits and vegetable as snacks. I guess the Special K is the only “diet” aspect to my plan, but I love cereal so it never really felt like one.

When I saw my doctor again in December 2005, I had lost 20 pounds and she was very excited, but suggested I up my goal to another 20 pounds for a total of 40. I agreed. I then started keeping a

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spreadsheet of my daily miles and flights of stairs. This is when I really kicked it up a notch, continuing to walk on both breaks and lunch when possible and taking more stairs. I think some people think I work on the sixth floor because I'll go up there just to take the stairs but will sometimes take the escalator down.

In the months that followed, I started working out a couple times a week outside of work – going to the park with my dog or using my friend's treadmill. I started jogging and doing ab exercises and using 2-pound weights to tone my arms. I still eat cereal twice a day during the week – in the morning my only requirement is the cereal's main ingredient be whole grain. For lunch, I have Special K with Grape Nuts and sometimes throw in a banana. I eat snacks of carrots and celery with fat-free ranch dip and an apple. This allows me to eat whatever for dinner, so I don't really ever deny myself any type of food. I just make sure I am more good than bad and I stay active.

When I saw my doctor again in July 2006, I had lost a total of 55 pounds – 15 pounds more than our goal. She was extremely proud and said she wished more patients listened to her and were as committed as I am. We discussed a healthy goal weight. She told me a number I shouldn't weigh any less than and that became my new goal, although I wasn't going to rush myself.

At the beginning of December, I got to my goal weight, but I gained 5 pounds during the holidays. I know I'll have to lose that again, but I am totally OK with that. You gotta be able to enjoy the holidays!

### **What obstacles and setbacks did you face along the way and how did you overcome them?**

I guess I haven't really had many because I've tried to be realistic. There will be weeks you gain, and times you choose the unhealthy snack – you just can't let little things like that stop you. Just because you messed up, doesn't mean you should throw in the towel. It just means you need to be better next time. No one can be perfect all the time. There were times I hit plateaus in my weight loss and had to step it up, and that can be frustrating, too.

I guess one obstacle for me is trying to vary my types of exercise and diet. I really like routine and don't mind doing the same things, which has helped me stay on track, but also means I don't get much variety. I eat the same vegetables and fruits and work the same muscles. That's one reason I was really glad CHFS started an exercise class at lunchtime. That has enabled me to work different muscle groups and do different types of exercise.

### **How have these changes affected your overall health and lifestyle?**

How have they not? I'm the healthiest I have ever been! I'm not at risk for diabetes anymore; my blood pressure and cholesterol are low. This past August, I participated in my first 5K – A Midsummer Night's Run – and enjoyed it so much I did the Black Cat Chase 5K with the CHFS team in October. I would have never dreamed I would run a 5K, much less enjoy it and do as well as I did.

### **What advice would you have for someone who wants to get healthy, but doesn't know where to start?**

Be realistic! Start small – walk on your work break, take the stairs, replace a snack of chips with some carrots, swap that third cup of coffee for a bottle of water, do a couple crunches while watching TV. If

you start working little things into your life, they become part of your life. Once you see results, you will be motivated to continue. Keep a chart of your exercise and eating habits. Don't start a diet – start a HEALTHY LIFESTYLE! Be realistic about setting your goal weight and don't expect to lose more than 1 to 2 pounds per week and don't expect to lose every week. Don't set a goal that if you mess up once, your whole timeline is thrown off.

Also important is to have a healthy attitude about food. People tend to punish themselves for eating “bad” foods or constantly stress about what they eat. If you're eating healthy and exercising you can have “bad” foods sometimes. I also don't think you have to eat all those low-fat or diet foods. You may eat more of those foods because they are diet foods and that's not good. Enjoy your non-diet food, just don't eat as much and don't eat it all the time. Also, don't skip breakfast. Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day – it gets your metabolism up and going for the day. Also, don't starve yourself or skip meals – that may tempt you to overeat later. Eat small healthy snacks – it keeps you full so you are able to pass by those unhealthy snacks and helps you save room for what you want to eat later.

### **How do you feel about yourself now?**

I feel great! I have more confidence about everything, not just my body. I know that I can accomplish my goals if I'm determined, hard working and positive.

### **How do you plan to make sure that good health and wellness practices are always a part of your life?**

All the things I do now are things I can do for the rest of my life. Plus, they are so engrained in my schedule that I can't imagine not doing them.

Everyone is always telling me how good I'm doing and that I look great and it helps me want to keep it up. I really have gotten so much support from my co-workers and especially my director, Eileen Cackowski, who encourages me to walk even when I'm tempted not to. Eileen says that's why we get breaks – to get away and recharge. Go get some fresh air and tackle the task when you get back – it will still be there.

### **Living Well: New Year's Resolutions**

*By Kris Hayslett*

The start of the New Year is a time for self-evaluation and self-improvement. To successfully keep your resolutions, follow these simple tips:

Do not try to overhaul your entire life. Focus on changing one or two things in your life based on importance to you. Reflect on the past years and decide which behaviors have affected your life. Identify which ones you have control to change.

Set realistic expectations for yourself. Unrealistic expectations can lead to failure and feelings of guilt. Behavior change is a constant process and not something that happens overnight. Keep a journal

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with a list of your long- and short-term goals. Short-and long-term goals will give you some ways to reward yourself while keeping you motivated. Avoid rewards that may interfere with your overall goals.

Find support. Look to family members and close friends for support. Tell them what you need and how they can help you. Identify a person that you can lean on when you run into tough times.

Don't give up. You are in charge of your own self-improvement. Everyone makes mistakes. Learn from them, move on and keep them from happening again. Take charge and ownership of your actions and gain some self-confidence that will allow you to feel proud of your achievements.

If you have made improving your health part of your goal for 2007, a few classes are being offered at CHFS that might help you along the way.

Cooper/Clayton smoking cessation sessions will be available for those who want to quit smoking. Join Chuck Piker, a former smoker and Cooper/Clayton graduate, for a 13-week smoking cessation session Thursday, Jan. 11, from noon - 1 p.m. in the cafeteria conference room. A schedule for the 13-week session will be provided on the first day.

And don't forget Get Healthy Kentucky lunch workouts in the third floor Distance Learning Center Room B in the Health Services Building from noon – 1 p.m. on the following dates:

Jan. 10 (Wednesday) – Hip Hop Dance  
Jan. 12 (Friday) - Kick Boxing  
Jan. 19 (Friday) – Low Impact Aerobics  
Jan. 24 (Wednesday) – Yoga/Pilates  
Jan. 26 (Friday) - Hip Hop Dance  
Jan. 31 (Wednesday) – Kick Boxing

Free fitness classes are also offered from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in the CHFS Cafeteria conference room. Join retired transportation employee and fitness instructor Patsy Goins for low impact aerobics, yoga and Pilates.

If you have questions about the smoking cessation session classes or the lunch workouts, contact Kris Hayslett at 564-9592, ext. 3797.

### **Time to End Cervical Cancer**

*January is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month*

The Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services (DMS) and the Department for Public Health (DPH) are joining forces to spread the Get Healthy Kentucky message about the importance of prevention by encouraging women to get regular screenings for cervical cancer.

The HPV vaccine – designed to prevent certain strains of the virus linked to cervical cancer – is viewed as one of the most important developments in women's health in recent years. However, DMS and DPH

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officials want women to understand that the vaccine does not prevent all strains of HPV or eliminate the need for annual Pap tests, gynecological exams that screen for cervical cancer.

“A Pap test is one of the most important health tools women can use to prevent cervical cancer,” said First Lady Glenna Fletcher. “Prevention is a key part of our Get Healthy Kentucky message, whether it be avoiding tobacco, following a nutritious eating plan or getting health screenings that detect for signs of illness and disease. This is one more thing we can do to ensure the future health and well-being of women in Kentucky.”

The Pap test, also called a Pap smear, screens for abnormal cells in the cervix that may turn into cancer if not treated. The screening is done in a doctor’s office or clinic and only takes a few minutes. Results of the test are usually ready within a few days.

If the results of the Pap test show abnormal cells that could become cancerous, treatment options are available to remove the cells. In most cases, the treatment prevents cervical cancer from developing.

“Cervical cancer remains a major threat to women’s health even though it’s entirely preventable,” said Ruth Ann Shepherd, M.D., director of the Division of Adult and Child Health Improvement in DPH. “The best way to avoid cervical cancer is to get regular screenings that can detect changes in the cervix early on, before cancer develops.”

“Women who don’t have health insurance or can’t afford a screening should call 1-800-4-CANCER to see if the Kentucky Women’s Cancer Program can be of assistance. If you are a Medicaid recipient, the screenings are covered through your KyHealth Choices plan,” said William Hacker, M.D., acting undersecretary for Health and public health commissioner. “If you aren’t up to date on your Pap tests, don’t wait. Call your health care provider immediately and schedule an appointment or contact our cancer program to see if you qualify for services.”

Typically, if abnormal cells are present in the cervix, it takes years before they develop into cervical cancer. That’s why physicians and health care providers continually stress the importance of regular screenings – to detect abnormal cells before they become cancerous.

“When it comes to leading healthy lives, we all have a role to play to protect ourselves from the onset of unnecessary illness,” said Hacker. “We simply cannot forgo the health screenings that can detect diseases before they become deadly.

### **ERC Recognizes Employees in 2006**

Every month, members of the Employee Recognition Committee are charged with finding two CHFS employees who have made a difference in the work place. The person is awarded a “You Make the Difference” certificate and silver lapel pin set acknowledging their contributions. These are our employees who were recognized for making a difference in 2006:

**Commissioner John Burt, MH/MR** – appreciated for being a leader with a caring and compassionate attitude.

**Angela Gould** – a helpful spirit.

**Terry Tindle** – for always trying to assist anyone in whatever direction their issues may take them. Certainly an asset to MH/MR.

**Janice Lunsford** – instrumental in paving the way for wellness at MH/MR, plus an inspiration in her journey in losing 84 pounds. Also instrumental in moving the walking program along here at Central Office.

**Undersecretary Mike Fields** – for commitment to the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and to the community.

**Amberlee Nickell** – for handling the KECC contributions during the Adorn-A-Fellow Employee event.

**Secretary Birdwhistell** – for support of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Employee Recognition Committee and our KECC Adorn-a-Fellow Employee event.

**Joe Allen Mattingly** – for unending patience and exceptional customer service. A tremendous ambassador for the Office of Information Technology.

**Cathy Cox** – commitment to expanding knowledge of the importance of what the language access section does by volunteering to teach a series of introductory Spanish lessons to OHRM employees during your lunch hour.

**Angela Gulette** - for her hard work and tenacity to do the right thing.

**Heather Boggs** - for caring and compassion.

### **Employee Recognition Tip**

#### **Help Co-workers Recover From Holidays**

*Michele Lilly, Office of the Ombudsman, ERC*

The holidays were a joyous time for many of us, and may also have been a difficult time for many. While the holidays are a time to be with family and friends, the season also can cause stress and fatigue. There are increased demands placed on time, patience and finances. It may take a little time for some people to recover from holiday stress.

It is important to our co-workers that we not only recognize them for who they are at work, but also that we appreciate and care about them for who they are outside of work. Now that you are back to work, be sure to remember your co-workers who may have had a difficult holiday. Ask them how they are doing and let them know you care and you were thinking about them during the holidays. Let them know how much you appreciate them as a person and a co-worker. You can do this verbally or by writing a simple note or a card.

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When you take the time to acknowledge someone, you could be making more of a positive difference in their lives than you think.

### Focus Health Tip of the Week

#### Are you SAD?

It is common this time of year that many people may experience feelings of depression and fatigue. That could be caused by seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

SAD occurs in the shorter days of fall and winter, when less light is present. Other causes of SAD researchers are studying include interruptions to a person's biological clock, as well as the presence of a chemical called serotonin in the body.

Women between the ages of 15 and 55 are most at risk for developing SAD. It is estimated that 60 to 90 percent of SAD sufferers are women.

Symptoms of SAD include irritability, sadness, anxiety, increased appetite, a craving for carbohydrates, weight gain, decreased activity, overall fatigue, a need for more sleep and increased daytime fatigue.

SAD is often treated with light therapy and sometimes with anti-depressants. If these feelings persist and are bothersome, consider talking with your doctor about SAD.

### Employee Enrichment

*By Anya Armes Weber*

*Employee Enrichment is a weekly feature for CHFS staff. These tips for making work better focus on team building, customer service and personal development.*

Many staff made the resolution to exercise more this year. The Mayo Clinic offers these tips for fitting fitness into your workday.

**Change your commute.** Walk or bike to work if you can. If you drive, park as far from the entrance as you are able.

**Take the stairs.** Start small by hopping off the elevator or escalator one or two floors early. Soon you will feel in shape enough to avoid them altogether.

**Use your break time.** Rather than taking a coffee break, use this timeout to walk around your building. Some staff even manage to fit a short exercise routine into their lunch hour.

**Prioritize physical activity.** Schedule your workouts just as you would any other appointment. Sometimes you may have to bump your fitness routine, but you should try to keep these plans firm.

**Plan ahead if you must travel.** On days when you are on the road for lengthy drives, make adequate pit stops to stretch and be active. If you're on an overnight trip, ask about hotel gym hours or pack a jump rope or a fitness DVD.

