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## The Lean Team walks the walk — 24,902 miles

David Quick | Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2012 12:01 a.m.  
UPDATED: Friday, March 23, 2012 7:37 p.m.

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David Quick / Paul Mitchell of Charleston carries a globe Saturday during a walk with The Lean Team, a group that reached a major goal of logging the equivalent of walking around the world, or more than 25,000 miles. The next goal? Walking the equivalent distance from the Earth to the Moon.

Talk about New Year's resolutions. One local group accomplished a major goal on New Year's Eve: walking the equivalent of the circumference of planet Earth.

About 30 people helped The Lean Team, a wellness initiative spearheaded by the Medical University of South Carolina and Charleston County School District, get past the cumulative 24,902-mile mark during its weekly walk on the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge on Saturday.

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Since Nov. 17, 2007, the out-and-back Saturday morning walks have started on the Charleston side of the bridge, at 8 a.m. during hot months and 9 a.m. during the rest of the year. Hundreds of people, including some one-timers, have participated in the walks, which are free and open to anyone.

Logging their walks to total the distance around the globe wasn't the original intention, but it started around a kitchen table, as MUSC Children's Hospital staff brainstormed with medical

students on ways to reach out to the public in tangible ways.

Initially, the group's goal was to walk the equivalent distance to Savannah. Leaders of the group would count the miles, take photos and send out weekly emails to a list that has grown to 700.

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Obviously, it didn't stop at Savannah. The next goal was around the United States. After that, it was around the world. But because staying true to fitness often requires goals, the next logical one is to keep on truckin' to the moon.

The Lean Team managed to keep its Saturday walk streak going because of the dedication of its four main leaders: registered dieticians Coleen Martin and Mary Joan Oexmann, school district physical education coordinator Dave Spurlock and MUSC adolescent medicine director Janice Key.

Sometimes they were the only ones walking or jogging due to weather, said Spurlock.

"We've been out here when it's 100, when it's been freezing and when it's been 45 knots (of wind) on top of the bridge," said Spurlock.

But they were always there to encourage and cajole people to use the bridge as a bond for the wellness movement..

Oexmann added, "This is our bridge. This is our community. If nothing else, it's an opportunity for a person to feel a part of this community."

The weekly emails, Martin said, also have worked to motivate people. Some who don't walk the bridge have told Lean Team members that the contact reminds them to get out the door and walk in their neighborhoods.

The Lean Team, which mainly works on wellness programs for school children, also has been challenged in the age of budget cutting but managed to hold on long enough to form alliances with corporations such as Food Lion and Boeing. Regardless of the future, the walks continued and will continue.

The group was joined Saturday, by mere coincidence, by a rock star of the international wellness community: Harvard researcher John Ratey, author of "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain." Despite a cold and "a bad wheel," Ratey walked and jogged the bridge.

Ratey, who has worked closely with Spurlock, was in town for the Renaissance Weekend and trumpeted Lean Team's effort as example of community events responding to the need to improve fitness, not only for the body but the brain.

"When you get a community organizing, that's wonderful," said Ratey, adding that cities across the world are starting community-wide efforts that tap into the same model as the Lean Team.

Ratey's emphasis is on exercise to benefit the brain, from children learning better to seniors keeping sharp.

"It's hard for people to understand because it's not something that is intuitively obvious. People think, 'If I just do Sudoku or crossword puzzles, I'll be OK. But you've got to pay attention to your diet and you've got to keep moving.'"



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