

Chandler leaders stay fit with vigorous workouts

by [Edythe Jensen](#) - Jun. 22, 2011 09:36 AM
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If there's ever a television reality show for physically fit government officials with desk jobs, Chandler would be a contender.

The mayor and four of the six City Council members follow rigorous exercise routines that include trips to the gym several times a week, long-distance running and cycling. Department directors are on the same track, and a frequent topic of conversation between meetings is the latest workout.

"A pretty high percentage of Chandler employees work out and have adopted fitness as a lifestyle," said Fire Chief Jeff Clark, 43. He spends about an hour a day on intense military-style CrossFit training.

City Attorney Mary Wade, 58, straps on a 35-pound backpack and hikes about 20 miles in the wilderness every weekend. Co-workers jokingly call City Manager Rich Dlugas, 57, and utilities director Dave Siegel, 56, "psychos" for their intense daily outdoor circuit training where they do sprints, squats and pushups between traffic cones in a school athletic field. And they don't take time off or go indoors during the summer.

Councilman Kevin Hartke, 55, cycles about 50 miles every Saturday while Assistant City Manager Pat McDermott, 62, alternates between street riding and mountain biking almost daily. He downplays his 15-25-mile jaunts, saying they are "short by cycling standards."

Councilman Jack Sellers, 68, said he's been running for 30 years and completed six marathons, although recent knee problems forced him to cut his daily distance to 3 miles.

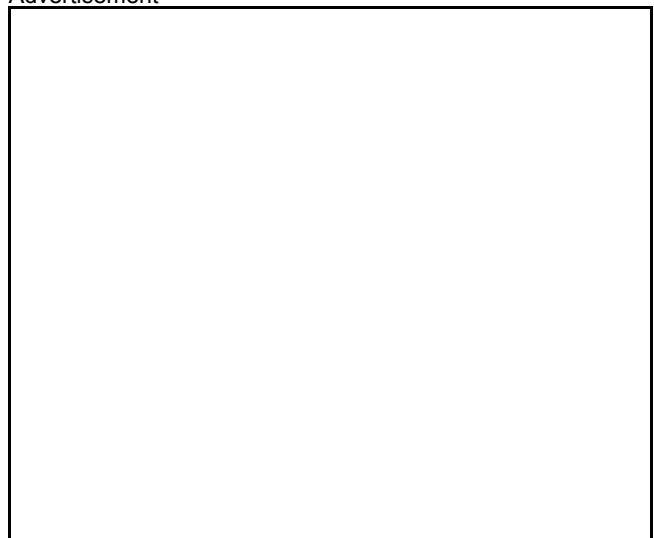
Councilman Rick Heumann, 57, finished the San Diego marathon earlier this month and launched a push to get more healthful snacks in City Hall vending machines. The candy bars are still there, but health-conscious city employees can now buy sunflower kernels, rice cakes, green tea and tomato juice.

The five-story Chandler City Hall has elevators, but many of these officials take the stairs.

When he's not hosting meetings Mayor Jay Tibshraeny, 56, heads for the gym several times a week, jogs and takes 25-mile Sunday bike rides.

The official who oversees Chandler's parks and recreation system, Community Services Director Mark Eynatten, 58, stepped up his exercise routine about two years ago after he saw an unflattering photo of himself and dropped 50 pounds.

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Communications Director Nachie Marquez, 47, is a former competitive swimmer who starts every day with a two-mile run. Public History Coordinator Jean Reynolds, 38, also is a daily runner who shoots for 7-13 miles.

All this daily exercise does more than build muscles and physical stamina, said Dr. John Ratey, a Harvard Medical School professor and author.

"It makes people better thinkers, more creative, more motivated and less stressed. It helps improve performance and makes the brain younger." He called Chandler officials' commitment to fitness "incredible . . . it must be a very well-run city."

Ratey's book, "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain," emphasizes the mental benefits of workouts, and he promotes physical fitness schools. The professor said he likely will mention Chandler's fitness culture in future public speaking engagements.

Nearly all of the city's exercisers say their routines ease stress. Lobbyist Patrice Kraus, 58, alternates between lengthy yoga sessions and gym treadmills and stationary bikes. Yoga is especially soothing when the state Legislature is in session, she said. Weekend wilderness hikes are as much mental as physical for Wade, the attorney. She relishes her encounters with wildlife and the natural beauty of mountains and rivers.

"I choose very remote locations where I don't run into people," she said.

For others there is the camaraderie of working out with family, friends or co-workers. Dlugas' family joins him in the cross-training sessions; his daughter, Chandler chiropractor, Dr. Caitlin Dlugas,

plans and directs the routine.

"I invited myself and begged to join them," said Siegel, the utilities director and a former Marine. "It's like boot camp."

Marquez said she tried yoga after hearing Kraus rave about the benefits. Reynolds said she wasn't a runner until she took a fitness class with other city employees.

Some joke that if one more City Council member joins the Fitness Forum gym at Dobson Road and Chandler Boulevard they'd have a quorum and would be required to post their workout sessions as a public meeting.

Tibshraeny, Heumann, Hartke and Chandler Justice of the Peace Keith Frankel are regulars at this family-owned gym.

"It's not just something to do," Heumann said of the hours he spends exercising. "We're trying to stay healthy and live longer lives."

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