On January 8th, 2020, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Walking into the New Year”, where we explored programs and partnerships that help to get community members moving, improving the physical, mental, and social well-being of all.

It featured Pam Jiner, Community Organizer and GirlTrek representative, David Sabgir, M.D., full-time cardiologist at Mount Carmel Health System and founder of Walk with a Doc, and Larry Smith, founder of the German Village Walking Club. Our inspiring panelists shared their own experiences, research and lessons in how individuals and communities are promoting walking and walkability through specific programs and engagements.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. All three of our panelists took time to offer their expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on the best practice ways advocates can be engaging with topics related to this work.

How do you measure out the walking distances? Do you 'pre-walk' them with either a pedometer or some other mechanism or device?

Larry: I set the distances by using mapmywalk.com. Easy. You go to the website, set a location or address where you want to start, start clicking your route along the street or path, and it adds up the distance. Adjust the route to get what you need.

David: The parks typically will have the distance of their trails, the mall will know the distance around. The walkers can also audit with their wearables.

Pam: Yes, I always pre-walk a scheduled trail, sidewalk or park distance and I use a Fitbit which records miles walked and the time it takes to complete the walk. Community walks very seldom end exactly on time because you have different abilities alongside. But for weekly walking groups, you can plan them better once you get to know everyone. When hosting Walking Audits, I always add 30 additional minutes to the walk time to allow for discussions along the way. I am a very strong and consistent walker and I could easily make record time climbing the Peoria Bridge and making it to the Light Rail Station. I've actually ran up to the top of the bridge, stopped and took pictures of everyone who was struggling to climb it. Depending on who's walking with me it may take anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes to reach the Light Rail Station. A mile is a mile..but by foot when you take into account one's physical ability and the travel conditions -a mile could seem to take forever. Plan accordingly.

I found in my walk program that my administration of the group was really time-consuming and tedious.
Larry: Simplify where you can. If you are leading a group from start to finish on all the admin, you or someone has to be champion for the program, and get help where you can. My wife helps me with the GVWC with newsletter, marketing, special events, and many of my members step up to volunteer to pace new people, help with events, take on special tasks. It is what you want to put in and get out of it.

David: Set aside a certain amount of time and pick your battles. Your walk will grow over time, provided someone is there to run it. Do not run the leadership into the group with small requests, continue to see the big picture and don't be afraid to say 'no'.

How do you get that many people to show up for your walking group?

Larry: For GVWC, we have a website, Facebook page, weekly newsletter, go to company health fairs, word of mouth, get involved in the community, etc. We built up over the last 5 years too. Takes time to get momentum and build a club.

David: We have a litany of marketing tips. Please feel free to reach out to us at contact@walkwithadoc.org for marketing tips. It is not a simple answer, Unfortunately.

Pam: First be consistent. Every walk that I schedule and share with people, is MY walk regardless who shows up. So I start out by choosing places that I want to walk, when I want to walk and for how long I want to walk. And I walk it! Since I chose to host most of my walks in my community, I had T-shirts made that people would recognize and associate with my purpose. Soon I had to purchase hundreds of T-shirts because everyone that walked with me wanted one. Now those people are connected to something that has meaning to them. I've given away over 1,000 T-shirts to people that join me on a walk or that I see walking in my community: to inspire them to inspire others. From donations, I've also been able to give away hundreds of water bottles. I connect to the people I come in contact with while out walking, exchange information and invite them to join me on a walk. I use social media, hand out flyers within my community, and word of mouth is my best advertisement. You must include a phone number so that people can call and ask questions. Also, I always make sure that we gather where there are restrooms, and I bring extra bottles of water and snacks that I hand out before the walk. Snacks can look like fruit roll-ups, oranges, apples, bananas, and even chips, packs of cookies, peanut butter crackers, etc. People love to walk and eat; it relaxes them. Also, I try to make the walks enjoyable. Your energy is contagious! Therefore, I start out my walks with introductions, I ask everyone to share something about themselves with the group; and I always share "Why I Walk - My story." Then I describe our route, ask everyone to keep an eye on the person behind them (because we never leave anyone behind). Depending on where we are walking, I try to incorporate breakfast or lunch options (indicate where you will gather after the walk) for those that want to hang around and get to know each other more. I make people feel comfortable, especially those that have concerns about their weight. I've found that "It's not what you eat" but "how much you move your body!" When I started walking daily back in 2016 I weighed 195 lbs. and wore a size 14. I decided to commit to walking and not worry about my weight and within three months I had lost nearly 30 lbs. I did not cut back on eating! What I did was found a way to incorporate a meal into my walking regimen and I quickly realized that I was adding fuel to my body, which I burned up while walking; and feeling satisfied allowed me to stay out walking for longer periods of time. My favorite walks are those that are destined to a food location (LOL)! Within 6 months of walking 5 days a week for at least 30 minutes, I had lost 63 lbs. and I have kept it off for three years. So I've learned that weight is a
combination of the amount of food that I eat; how regular I move my body; and my stress level. Walking reduces stress, increases blood flow and strengthens the heart; reduces blood sugar levels; connects us with ourselves, our community, to nature, our hopes and dreams, and causes weight loss. Walking is the best exercise for your physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health combined. Walking will change your life and the lives of your family members!

*My walkers thought that 9:30 am Saturday was early. What do you find is a good time and why?*

**Larry:** You have to pick a day and time, and run (walk) with it. I hear 8am is too early; some people want to go earlier in the summer when it is warmer. Some people have their favorite yoga class, want to sleep, etc. If people are interested, they will join you. And, I am not worried if they come out, see what we are about, and decide it is not for them. Can't please everyone.

**David:** We go at 8:30 am ;) I've found, by definition, you can't make everybody happy. Options include polling your walkers and finding the most favored time or holding more than one walk.

**Pam:** Anytime that I am free to walk is a good time. I encourage all my walkers to walk at least 5 days a week for at least 30 minutes. We don't just walk one day a week. I also encourage everyone to be leaders. I start them off walking on their own first (to allow them time to heal - we all have some healing to do) then they begin adding people and truly connecting to one another. Before you know it, you have a community of people that truly like one another (LOL) and allows everyone to be themselves. Then I share some basic group safety measures for leading large groups (taught by Jonathon Stalls) like assign someone to stand in front of immediate oncoming traffic with their arms extended while your group crosses a street. Group walking is best if you make it a NON-JUDGEMENT ZONE where everyone is welcome. This way, there are walks to join on multiple days of the week and times to accommodate everyone that wants to join a group walk. Those that want to walk at 9:30 can walk at 9:30. Let someone else lead the walk. FREEDOM!!!! Being a group leader is not designed to be stressful. Don't allow it!

*How do you walk with and accommodate older people who bring their walkers while balancing/accommodating the speed of the group?*

**Larry:** We have all paces of walkers. I just ask that people try to "walk with purpose", not window shopping, but walking like they have to get some place - whatever that pace means to them. The walkers distribute with people of "like" paces. Can't control that; just support and make sure everyone knows where they are going and have someone to walk with.

**David:** Everyone goes at their own pace. Has to be that way.

*How did you advertise the walking group the first few times you held this? I love the walking groups!*

**Larry:** We are on the weekly e-newsletter of the German Village calendar, word of mouth, start being part of the community. Sometimes you start with 2 or 3 people, and build from there. Just get a few friends together.

**David:** We have a litany of marketing tips. Please feel free to reach out to us at contact@walkwithadoc.org for marketing tips. It is not a simple answer, unfortunately.
**Pam:** All Walking Audits with decision makers were by invitation. I first looked at the problems we were faced with in my community and then identified with the help of City Council and my Registered Neighborhood Organization all the government agencies responsible to make improvements. I picked several dates well enough in advance of the scheduled Walking Audit and sent out a Doodle Pool asking people what days worked best for them. Then I selected the day and time based on who was most needed to be there and the times they were available to attend. I was not able to get everyone there that I wanted, but once I selected the date, time and confirmed the location; some decision makers would adjust their schedules in order to attend. And, perhaps this is why it took 4 Audits to get the bulk of the work done. It takes a lot of time to organize because no one really has time to go out and take a walk during work hours, so they would send a representative (that would report back) who could not always answer our questions. I added City Council Reps, other community advocates and organization Directors who also needed this gateway to be walkable for their program use; and residents from my community - especially those in wheelchairs, pushing walkers, mom's with small children, etc. Again consistency and not giving up eventually delivered the Executives in charge that I needed to hear from before any change or progress could begin to take shape. Also, I participated in several 9News broadcasts sharing my perspective on the City of Denver's sidewalk situation; and I did a Documentary funded through the Colorado Trust on Public Transportation. I’m confident that the word got back to City officials that this old lady was not going to walk away from the improvements needed for her community. CDOT will be landscaping the gateway at Peoria & I-70 when they finish working on the infrastructure.

*Larry, you have 3-5 routes planned and you meet at the same place every Saturday, do people ask for different routes? How do people find out about German Village walks? Are you available every Saturday? what if you cannot make it? Do you rely on an email list? Do people need to let you know they are coming for a walk? Has there been any health problems on a walk? Do you have a "sweeper" on each walk to make sure the slower walkers know the route? I start my walking group at 10:30, do you find that 8am is a good start time?*

**Larry:** I have 5 routes and they are on our website: [www.gvwalkingclub.com](http://www.gvwalkingclub.com). I post in our weekly e-newsletter the route of the week - it has a link to the route on the website, with the route described. We meet every Saturday at 8am statue in Schiller Park in German Village. The weekly newsletter goes to our Facebook page, German Village Walking Club. You can like us on FB, and you can send me an email at [larrywalksfast@gmail.com](mailto:larrywalksfast@gmail.com) if you want me to put you on our weekly e-newsletter for club news, health articles and weekly route. People show up if they are available. We have had a few people trip while walking from uneven pavement. We make sure everyone is accounted for, and have an unofficial sweeper. 8am is generally a good time. Never going to please everyone with the time. But, by getting out at 8am, you finish your daily exercising and socializing by 9 or 10am, and now you still practically have your entire Saturday!