



WOMEN STUN NOTRE DAME

Mountaineers defeat Irish, 65-63

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'WE'RE LIFELONG LEARNERS'

Hands-on PR chief marks milestone year

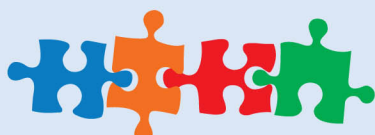
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the Charleston Gazette

THE STATE NEWSPAPER — OUR 138TH YEAR

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THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

'I WANT TO TELL PEOPLE: THIS IS POSSIBLE'



“Food was ... like fuel for your car. Except I have to admit, I was a whole lot more careful about what I put in my car.”

— Dannie Cunningham

KATE LONG | Gazette

Dannie Cunningham, 61, has dropped 56 pounds and cut his blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol down to normal range by working with a diabetes counselor. “I will tell anybody who will listen that you can beat diabetes — and even keep yourself from getting it — by watching what you eat and staying on the move,” Cunningham said.

You can prevent, control diabetes

By Kate Long
Staff writer

BELLEVILLE — Dannie Cunningham, 61, climbed the steep hill behind his house, crunching briskly through oak leaves, whacking weeds with his walking stick. “Maybe I’ll get lucky and flush out a rabbit,” he said.

He was headed for his hunting camp at the top of the second hill, hustling up the path, laughing and teasing a reporter trailing along behind him. “I hear you puffing a bit there, don’t I?” he called over his shoulder.

This is a man who beat back diabetes and chopped his blood pressure and cholesterol in half.

Experts have advised West Virginia to establish statewide diabetes management programs to bring down the state’s high chronic disease rates.

Cunningham can testify that they work. “Last year, I couldn’t have climbed like this,” he called. “I owe it to Devena.”

Devena Moore is one of the state’s top-five diabetes reduction counselors. “I lucked into her program,” Cunningham said.

He stopped to philosophize. “Now I’ll ask you a question,” he said, jabbing the air with his finger. “Why aren’t we as careful with our bodies as we are our cars? I’m a stickler when it comes to my cars and four-wheel-



One in three adult Virginians is now obese. Dannie Cunningham — at 237 pounds in this 2009 photo — is no longer among the one in three. “I lowered that statistic a little bit,” he said.

Courtesy photo

ers, stuff like that. I change the oil when I’m supposed to. I change the air filters. But before Devena, I was nowhere near as careful to maintain my own body. Why is that?”

Not missing a beat, he shrugged and started back up the path. “Now I’ll tell you how I got in trouble,” he said. “After my first wife died, I spent eight years as a bachelor. That’s when I packed on the pounds.”

He was working at a glass plant as he had for 20 years, he said, mostly running machines. “I had a long drive to work, so I got used to shoveling the fast food in. I’d eat a

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THE HOPE

'WE CAN BEAT THIS'

By Kate Long
Staff writer

“We can beat this,” said Dr. Alan Ducatman, interim dean of the West Virginia University School of Public Health. “If we decide from top to bottom that we’re going to do this, we can do it.”

West Virginia occupies a top slot on almost every awful health ranking: diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and others.

“There’s a new feeling that it doesn’t have to be that way,” said Christina Mullins, director of the state Office of Maternal Child and Family Health. “There is new energy to lower these numbers. There’s a sense of urgency.”

One in four West Virginia fifth-graders have high blood pressure, cholesterol and obesity, well above the national average.

As millions in health reform dollars roll into West Virginia, “we have the chance of a lifetime to make it different,” said Dr. Rahul Gupta, director of the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department.

SEE HOPE, 13A

SCHOOL BOARD

New faces seek seats

By Amy Julia Harris
Staff writer

As members of the Kanawha County school board face mounting community discontent from Charleston’s West Side over renaming West Side Elementary School after Mary C. Snow, one woman at the forefront of the renaming battle has decided to throw her hat into the upcoming school board election.

Linda Moon Ealy, the wife of Rev. James D. Ealy, filed to run for the school board as a way to provide a “listening ear and understanding to the community,” said Ealy, who will challenge incumbent Robin Rector for her seat.

“It was in the face of some of the opposition of the changing of the name of the school [that I decided to run] and I feel like we need more of a voice on the board because there’s some disrespect and disregard for the community,” said Ealy, a 15-year resident of Charleston’s West Side. “There has been a lot of misunderstanding and I thought

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W.VA. LEGISLATURE

Critics say bill goes too far

Proposal bans raising funds during session

By Lawrence Messina
The Associated Press

West Virginia would not be the first state to ban its legislators from raising funds while in session, as a pending measure proposes, but critics say the bill’s current wording presents several unintended or unfair consequences.

State Sen. Mike Green said fundraising during last year’s special primary election for governor helped prompt him to introduce the legislation. While his bill would not apply to that office, the six Democrats and eight Republicans who ran in 2011 included five lawmakers.

These legislators attracted 35 percent of the \$909,000 raised by all candidates during that year’s regular session. The lawmakers who ran also held nine of the 22 fundraising events that coincided with the

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DANNIE

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hamburger while I drove to work, then throw down a hamburger on the way home.

"I never thought a thing of it, kept it up till I got married again. To me, food was just food, like fuel for your car, except I have to say, I was a whole lot more careful about what I put in my car."

He stops to point out deer tracks. "These are fresh," he said.

He pointed up a second steep hill. "My wife and I, we'll stay up at hunting camp two or three days at a time," he said. "It's a real getaway." Turkey and deer stroll by their window in the morning, he said. Nobody can reach them by phone. The stars shine clear and bright at night.

"My grandkids love it up there," he said. They set a bathtub against the hillside by the stream. The pond's full of bass and bluegill. "My wife shot our first deer this year up there, with her crossbow.

"The grandkids like to wrassle their old poppy," he said. "I can keep them going now. Last year, I couldn't."

Last year, he weighed almost 250 pounds at 5' 7." "I couldn't go anywhere without huffing and puffing," he said. "In church, it had got so I had to prop my Bible on my belly, because I couldn't get it down between my legs."

Cunningham stopped walking and laid his hand over his heart. "I'll tell you what happened to me," he said. "One day, I was walking to the mailbox, and all the sudden, I felt like somebody had grabbed me from behind and was crushing my chest."

His blood pressure shot up to 220 over 180. His wife rushed him to the hospital. The doctors put a stent in his heart and sent him home. "Three months later, it happened again. That time, they put in a longer stent."

He patted his chest. "My doctor said if I didn't lose the extra weight, I'd be gone from this world," he said. "I made up my mind to shed some pounds."

He stretched out an arm over the broad farming valley rolling out below the hill. "You can see why I'd like to stick around," he said.

"And I'll tell you something else," he said, cocking his head, "It's kind of embarrassing to see a doctor write out that word 'obese.' That was a real wake-up call all on its own."

Worth it

Cunningham has lost about 56 pounds, gone from a size 40 waist to a 36, from a size 17½ neck to a 15.

"I want to tell people: This is



KATE LONG | Gazette photos

Dannie Cunningham loves to hunt and walk in the hills above his home. A year ago, he couldn't. "You can see I have a lot to live for, can't you?" he said.

"The grandkids like to wrassle their old poppy. I can keep them going now. Last year, I couldn't."

DANNIE CUNNINGHAM

possible," he said. "I want people to know they can do it. That's why I'm talking to you. People need somebody like Devena to get them started right, but they can turn it around."

His doctor referred him to Devena Moore, who runs DREAM, the diabetes self-management program for the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department in Parkersburg.

Nobody keeps an accurate list of such programs in West Virginia. At the professional diabetes educator site, fewer than 80 are listed for West Virginia, mostly located in Charleston, Huntington, Morgantown, Parkersburg, and the Eastern Panhandle.

Very few are listed in rural southern and central West Virginia, where the need is greatest.

Lucky for Dannie Cunningham, he lives near Parkersburg. When he first walked through Moore's door, he was diabetic, with high blood pressure and cholesterol and serious heart issues.

"It had never really hit me that my weight could be causing all those things," he said. "I didn't know you could get your blood sugar back down to normal level.

"Devena teaches you how to manage your own health," Cunningham said. "You learn what food does in your body and how exercise helps and

what's in the food you buy. She teaches you how to measure a serving and little tricks that make medicine work better for you.

The first week in the program, he said, he wore a pedometer that counted his steps. "First thing, you find out what you're already doing, so you know where you're starting from. Then the second week, she starts you keeping a food log. You don't change anything you do. Just write down everything you eat.

"That's what I did, and I'm telling you, there were surprises! I found out I was eating more than I thought at night!

"Devena and me, we'd go over my list, and she'd make suggestions."

"It's not something you can do in 15 minutes, visiting a doctor," he said. "It takes more time than that."

After six months, his triglycerides had dropped from 597 to "a little less than 200," he said. He cut his cholesterol in half, to 130.

Moore taught him how to read food labels and count carbohydrates and keep track of the fuel he was putting into his body, compared with what his body burned with exercise.

As he marched up the hill toward the camp, he pulled back his flannel shirttail to show he

had his pedometer on. "I've got a little book called Calorie King that breaks down fast food menus," he said. "I was getting Burger King spicy chicken sandwiches, thinking they were low-fat till I looked in there and found it has more fat than a hamburger." He switched to a low-fat sandwich.

His weight is staying off, but he still keeps his food log. "It's part of my life now. It keeps me on track. I check in with Devena once a month so I can show off."

At the top of the hill, he threw his arms wide, gesturing at a wide, round field. "Take a look at heaven," he said. A camper sits at the edge of the field under a shelter. He showed off the pathways he mows through the brush to attract deer.

"I climb up here several times a week," he said. "Right now, there's not much more I want out of life, except maybe a 10-point buck.

"My neighbor got a nine-point yesterday. That means I need to get a 10-point," he said. "I'll be back up here tonight, waiting for it.

"If I have to keep track of what I eat, to have this, it's worth it," he said. "I just wish everyone knew how to do it."

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Devena Moore, Dannie Cunningham's health coach, demonstrates a simple exercise using a stretchy band that fits in your pocket. "It's an instant gym," she says.

Downsize, starch down, leave behind

Nurse Devena Moore, Dannie Cunningham's health coach, directs the diabetes program for the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department in Parkersburg. Here are her tips:

1. Eat a healthy breakfast. Your morning meal sets the stage for the rest of your day, so start it off right.
2. Downsize your food. If you love your morning bagel, have it, but instead of a large bagel, which can cost you 350 to 500 calories, try a mini with only 80 to 100 calories. You just saved 270 to 400 calories.
3. Starch down. Try cutting back on your portion of rice, pasta or noodles by just 1/4 cup. You don't have to give up the foods you love. Just cut them back and see how they add up.
4. Make baking healthier. Replace half of the fat in a recipe with applesauce. Per 1/2 cup, applesauce contains 90 calories, but butter or margarine contains 810 calories. This simple switch just saved you 720 calories per 1/2 cup.
5. Soda shocker: You are afraid to set a goal or change your lifestyle because you refuse to give up your soda. If you drink an eight-ounce can of regular soda rather than the 12-ounce size, you save 50 calories.
6. Leave behind. You don't have to finish it all if you are full. Why not leave three or four bites on your plate? Anything you leave behind is calories saved.
7. Take a walk. Don't worry about how long or far you go. Just get out there. Even five minutes is better than nothing.
8. Look to others for motivation. See how others overcome similar struggles and obstacles. Everyone makes mistakes. You fail only if you don't try.
9. Track your food. Write down what you eat. Study it. No matter how it adds up, you'll learn from it, and you'll be more accountable to yourself.
10. Before you go out to eat, check the nutrition facts. That way, you can make an informed choice. Quick decisions can really cost you calorie-wise.
11. Get yourself a stretchy band. It's an instant gym that you can keep in your pocket.

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