

Walk tall

► A former squash champ promotes the wonders of walking



SUSAN DEVOY, 45
Tauranga, Bay of Plenty

Why she's an action figure She created the site - Wonderwalkers.co.nz - to inspire women to get striding.

WHY WE ADMIRE HER

A former world squash champion and busy mum to four boys, Susan Devo knows first hand the challenges time-poor women face when it comes to exercise. . . and how even the simplest activity can transform someone's fitness. Walking has always been a big part of Devo's life. In 1998, she walked the length of New Zealand (in just seven weeks) to raise funds for muscular dystrophy. "For me, walking is not just about the exercise – it's my antidepressant; it's my time out," she says.

So while walking around Tauranga one day with her friend Paula Thompson, the pair decided that inspiring women to walk for fitness (of mind *and* body) would be their next, er, step.

HOW SHE DID IT

Despite being a self-proclaimed "IT luddite" at the beginning of her Wonderwalkers venture, Devo put in some serious hours to get the Wonderwalkers website up and marching. "We did a lot of research, and looked at a lot of walking sites, but they were all a bit mundane. We wanted to do something a little bit light-hearted, not so serious, and take the guilt factor out of exercising," Devo says. "Ultimately, we wanted to be a portal of information for everything to do with walking." This meant finding every public walk known to man, woman or dog in NZ for the site's comprehensive "walking routes" section, compiling a list of tread-able events, and putting together a team of experts to answer questions on anything from nutrition to psychology.

WHAT SHE'S ACCOMPLISHED

Since the Wonderwalkers site launched six months ago, it's attracted an impressive 5000 members, and Devo and Thompson watch with pride as women use the online meeting place to gain motivation to hit the ground striding. "Women like to share information about all kinds of things. They come on and talk to their friends, and they often have the same problems when it comes to exercise: it's [lack of] time, or fitting it in around the kids, or getting the motivation to do it every day, or their weight," Devo explains.

Being able to share their trials or triumphs is the point of the site – and, according to Devo, another benefit of walking, too. "Women like to walk because they can talk!" Women posting on the website share their latest walking accomplishments, and motivate others to do more. "What a great site – loving the walk diary," says one post. "I got off my butt today!" says another walker motivated by the site.

THE FUTURE

Devo is confident that Wonderwalkers will attract an increasing number of members. Soon a walking buddy match-up service for women all over NZ will be possible, getting women started on the path to better health. Devo is excited Kiwi women now have a place to go to celebrate walking, rather than being embarrassed it's their only form of exercise. "Walking is good for your body, mind, soul and the planet," says Devo. "Not everyone can do triathlons, or be super athletes, but everyone can do something." All you need to do is lace up those shoes.

ACT NOW! Ways to walk up a sweat

WALK THE LINE

Get involved in Wonderwalkers by joining its chat forums, contributing a walking route in your area, or tracking the distance you've done in your own Walk Diary. It's all at wonderwalkers.co.nz.

STEP UP

Join Susan in the Rotorua Marathon (May 2), or participate in any of the other hundreds of events happening around NZ. Check out walkingnewzealand.co.nz for a list of events.

MOVE IT FOR MA

Enter the Auckland Run 4 Mums event on Mother's Day (that's May 10, if you'd forgotten), and walk it. Your entry fee helps The Nurture Foundation for Reproductive Research. For registration details, see nurture.org.nz.

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