



Mayor's

Challenge

Colchester 2003

Executive Summary

Mayor Mike Smith is leading the residents of Colchester County in a physical activity campaign by challenging himself to bike the distance equivalent of biking across Canada (over 8000 km) in a year. Over 500 residents have accepted the Mayor's Challenge and are keeping track of their physical activities to see how far they can go.

Why the Mayor's Challenge?

The number of children and youth in our communities that are obese or overweight is increasing as the acceptance for sedentary lifestyles is maintained. With the growing expense to offer physical education and the rising costs of facility memberships, access to activity can be difficult for the average individual or family.

The Municipality of the County of Colchester has decided to take a stand against physical inactivity and take the initiative to improve access, increase motivation and set a high standard for their residents. Colchester County has committed to providing equitable opportunities for all residents to improve their health and quality of life. We would like to motivate people to challenge themselves to become more active and continue to be active throughout their lifetime.

Mayor Mike Smith has lead the campaign by challenging himself to increase his daily physical activity and bike a distance equivalent to biking across Canada in a year. To date (August 2003), Mayor Smith has made it more than 70 % of the way despite some set backs from sports related injuries. Municipal council and staff have also taken up the challenge and have all reported various benefits such as weight loss, increased energy and having fun with their families.

So far, the project has been a huge success. Registration began January 1, 2003 and within a month 500 adults, 200 children and 11 schools (another 1500 children) had taken up the challenge. Over 250 different people have participated in the events and activities offered over the last 7 months.

The Mayor's Challenge has also been well received by businesses in the community. Many businesses have kindly sponsored events, donated prizes for events or offered free media services to promote the project. The challenge is sponsored by the local radio stations, the local newspaper, and endorsed by all the local fitness facilities. These partnerships have been successful because they also believe that active, healthy lifestyles are important to the residents of Colchester County.

The first year of the challenge had two specific target groups, individuals and their families, and active school communities. Each component has the same ultimate goal of getting people more physically active but has taken on separate formats for achieving their goals.

Component #1 - The Individual Challenge

The individual challenge has encouraged over 500 Colchester County citizens to challenge themselves, their family, and friends to increase their physical activity levels together. All participants have chosen their own goals based upon their current level of fitness and the commitment they are willing to dedicate to reaching their goals.

Participants are keeping track of their physical activity in a specially designed log book they received upon registration for the challenge. While many activities are intense and strenuous they may not cover a lot of distance in kilometers. Therefore, in an attempt to keep the challenge fair to all participants who enjoy a wide range of physical activities, each activity holds a "Mayor Mile" value equivalent to the amount of energy expenditure required to bike one kilometre. A chart of equivalencies has been provided in the log book for quick reference. (1 mayor mile = 1 kilometre)

Through partnerships with local fitness facilities we have been able to offer opportunities for individuals to participate in group activities such as swimming, skating and hiking. There has been at least one organized event each month that challengers can attend to stay active. The activities have varied according to the season and have taken place throughout the county. Some successful events include a curling bonspiel, 100 kilometre bike rally, paintball challenge, and children's activity days.

For those who enjoy learning about health and wellness, a healthy workshop series was available through a local fitness club. Information has been available for beginner athletes as well as for those who are experienced but desire to improve their performance.

Are there any other benefits? YES! We have been keeping participants motivated by highlighting their success through various media. Updates on the Mayor's progress and the activities he enjoys have substantially increased the hits on the Municipal web site. People have taken advantage of the many opportunities to get together and try new things and those participants who send in their progress have been entered in prize draws announced on the local radio stations.

Component #2 - The School Challenge

The Mayor's Challenge has asked the schools to set a challenge goal for the entire school community. Each school administration team has taken the Mayor's Challenge and have adopted it to meet their individual school objectives. They have each chosen unique methods of encouraging their students to become more active such as creating new after-school programs or lunch hour clubs.

Support and information has been provided for teachers who were interested in incorporating activity into their classroom as well as assistance with planning events for the whole school community. Information packages covering topics such as packing a

nutritious lunch, the Canadian guide to physical activity for youth, and getting your kids active have been available for parents who wish to support the school initiative. Seeing the Challenge used in elementary math classes to demonstrate percentages, charts and calculations was incredible.

Some of the schools and students who have participated in the challenge have been featured on the Municipality of the County of Colchester's web site. The local media has been very supportive with covering the Mayor's Challenge events and successes. At the end of the school year some of the schools provided opportunities for children to win some Mayor's Challenge prizes and a visit from Mayor Mike Smith.

Oh the Challenges...

The Mayor's Challenge was a jump start for the otherwise "sleeping" recreation department. Before June 2002 when the municipality decided to hire a Manager of Recreation, the department had taken a backseat to other municipal services. The challenge helped to increase awareness of the recreation department and brought recreation services back into the community.

Many participants have been motivated by seeing the success of their Mayor and reading about his recent adventures. Unfortunately Mike Smith's latest adventure was getting two flat tires on his bike, hitting a pot hole, falling in a ditch and breaking his elbow. Although this has slowed down Mayor Smith's ride across the country, challenge participants are encouraged that he is still keeping active and earning mayor miles through other activities. While this was a setback to the Mayor's progress, it was by no means a detriment to the program. As of two weeks ago, he has received the okay from his doctors to get back on the bike and "hit the road" the way he intended in the first place.

Some partnerships with local fitness facilities have been a challenge in itself. Resources promised to assist the project along the way have fallen through due to people changing their minds and not communicating with the recreation department. Although frustrating at the time, it has not affected the Mayor's Challenge's outcomes, activities or events.

Conclusion

The success of the Mayor's Challenge has been credited to the strong leadership provided by Mayor Mike Smith, Municipal Council, and the flexibility of the program. Each participant has been able to adopt the challenge to fit into their lifestyle. Participants are trying new activities and learning more about Colchester County and its resources. The challenge officially ends in December 2003 but the Municipality of the County of Colchester will continue to provide their residents with opportunities to stay active and improve their quality of life.

Why Should the Mayor's Challenge be Chosen for the Municipal InNOVAward?

This initiative proves that you don't have to spend a lot of money to improve your residents quality of life. The overall health of the community has improved with a startup budget of only \$5,000 and another \$10,000 (which includes summer staff) to provide countless recreation opportunities for children and adults. Our residents have warmly embraced the program and accepted the challenge to increase their physical activity levels together. The Challenge has resonated with our citizens. Kids are seen everywhere wearing their Mayor's Challenge t-shirts. People are talking, and more importantly, they are participating. It's a pretty simple idea, really, and maybe that's the key to the success.