

Fiona in Focus

Mayor Betsy Price's push for fitness showing results



When I first moved to Texas in November, 2005, from Canada, I was stunned by how little people walk on a daily basis. Having lived in cities like Montreal, Canada and Edinburgh, Scotland, I was used to getting around without a car -- using public transport, walking or cycling to get from A to B. In these cities commuting by bike for many was normal, a way of squeezing a workout into an otherwise sedentary day. In Scotland, people of all ages think nothing of spending an entire day trailing around the stores on foot, often toting large bags full of groceries. Here, shoppers generally take their car to go from one side of a mall parking lot to the other. I usually cycle to my local gym, which is about a mile from my house and people are constantly amazed that I do this. Last week, however, I was told by a lovely lady in my pilates class that whenever she saw me heading to the gym on my bike I reminded her of the wicked witch in the Wizard of Oz. Note to self -- do not wear cape and pointy hat when going to the gym. But I digress...



Clearly a city's infrastructure is an important factor when it comes to promoting a more active lifestyle, and in order to make cities more pedestrian and bicycle friendly certain challenges have to be overcome. Many city officials would shy away from this challenge but not Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price. Mayor Price is not only promoting a healthy lifestyle in her community but is leading by example. In her early sixties, Mayor Price is an avid cyclist who regularly logs around 75-100 miles per week in the summer and around 50-60 in the winter. She also runs and regularly competes in 5K races in the area, usually covering the distance in under 40 minutes. It is her city

wide initiatives, however, that are the most impressive. Over the past few years she has engaged the community in stemming the rise in obesity, especially in children. Schools, churches, retailers and non-profits have come on board and, through a shared vision of a healthier community, they are making a difference in the lives of many by promoting exercise and good nutrition.

"We have a fitness challenge for kids, where different schools compete to win PE equipment," she said. "Kids track food, water, exercise. We were amazed that 25,000 kids participated. Parents have contacted me saying, 'We were prepared to hate you. We're cooking dinner, the kids are doing their homework, and they'll say we need to go outside because Mayor Price said so.' When you start to get outside, you meet your neighbors. Then you're engaged in your neighborhood, your neighborhood community becomes stronger, which in turn makes neighborhoods safer. We also have the Fit 15 challenge. Businesses have employees walk at least 15 minutes a day. Steer Fort Worth, a group of politically minded folks I help organize, works on revamping the cafeterias at schools with healthier options."

Mayor Price has also worked to make the city more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. Under her leadership, Fort Worth has become a foremost cycling community, adding miles of new bike lanes and trails. Promoting pedestrian-friendly urban villages also has remained a staple of Price's vision for rebuilding the city's urban core. Moreover, she continues to push her long-term goal of linking neighborhoods and job centers with a comprehensive and convenient commuter rail system.

Mayor Price organized the 3rd annual Mayor's Triathlon on July 12 in which athletes swam, biked and ran through Fort Worth's beautiful neighborhoods. It was a huge success and participants already are looking forward to next year's event.