

traffic court

Sensible strategies, support network made difference in woman's weight loss success

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

One of the most difficult things to do when seeking any sort of support – be it emotional, physical or some combination of the two – is connecting with the right people. Sometimes the search alone can be overwhelming, but Martina Sierra is a walking testament to what is possible when someone commits to finding the right people.

When Sierra joined Taking Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) in 2007, she weighed 253 pounds. Today, she weighs 136 pounds and has kept the weight off for more than six years.

“The support made a 100 percent difference. I knew there was a group of people that cared about me as a person and cared about my journey to being a healthier person. They were going to be there for me when I was having a bad time and I could be there for them,” Sierra said.

TOPS (www.tops.org) is a non-profit organization and network of weight loss support groups. Keizer has three TOPS chapters with weekly meetings, one at Faith Lutheran Church, another at John Knox Presbyterian Church and the third at Clear Lake United Methodist Church. Meeting days and times are available at the website. National and individual club dues amount to about \$8 per month. Sierra is the club



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD
Martina Sierra has lost more than 115 pounds since joining Taking Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) in 2007. She now leads the TOPS chapter at John Knox Presbyterian Church.

leader at John Knox and the area captain for all of Marion and Polk counties.

While Sierra has stuck with TOPS, attending her first meeting was something of an ambush.

“I had lost weight and

gained it back and gained more back. Then, one day, my mother appeared at the door and said, ‘You’re coming with me, we’re going to TOPS.’ I said, ‘What’s TOPS?’” Sierra said. Her mother explained on the drive to the meeting.

TOPS meetings start with a weigh-in followed by a roll call in which the members declare whether they’ve lost or gained weight since the last week.

“That can be the most difficult part of the meeting because some people will have lost and others will gain. If the member has lost weight, we congratulate them, if they gained we remind them that we are glad they came to the meeting,” Sierra said.

After the roll call, someone in the group leads a program about new exercise techniques or nutrition information that might lead to better results. There is no formalized meal plan members have to buy into, but there is a constant feedback loop with awards for weekly and monthly weight loss, long-term results as well as statewide and national competitions. Last year, the organization challenged members to lose more than 1 million pounds. As a whole, they met and exceeded the goal. Club members are encouraged to work with their regular physicians when setting weight goals.

“My original doctor set my goal at 165 and said I would never make it. I proved him wrong,” Sierra said.

If there is a catch, it’s one that most dieters come to realize anyway: it’s a marathon, not a sprint. It took Sierra five years to meet her first goal (she can cite the date it happened), but she also kept the weight off by changing her lifestyle in small ways over time.

“One of the most important things I did was journaling,” Sierra said. “I would write down what I was eating and what I felt like when I was eating. I was able to discover patterns in my own eating and learn about nutrition in general.”

She changed portion sizes, but never denied herself the occasional treat in modera-

tion. She also started moving more even when doing routine things like watching TV.

Through it all, the support of other TOPS members was crucial. When the meeting times for her original group in south Salem stopped working for her schedule, she visited four other club meetings before settling into the club at John Knox. Aside from enjoying the humor of the group, she found they did other things like keeping in contact outside of meetings that helped on her journey.

“I got a note from the leader of the group the week I visited. I had already decided I was going back, but that made me feel like they really cared. I’m now the leader of the group and the one trying to make those connections,” Sierra said.

Her service dog, King, a 6-year-old English black Labrador, also became the group’s unofficial mascot. It was committing to finding a group that worked best for her that has kept her motivated and spurred growth in ways that extend beyond the confines of the meetings.

“That support is important when you’re having a bad day and someone says, ‘I’m glad you came today because we need you here,’” Sierra said. “I lost weight, but I grew as a person. I gained self-confidence and became less isolated and more willing to put myself out there.”

NO LICENSE

Joseph Daniel Whittle, \$175; Oscar Bautista Sosa, \$265; Isaias Barrera Alvarez, \$245.

NO INSURANCE

Michael Patrick O’Malley, \$600; Teresa Kay Gabriel, \$642; Cassandra Michelle Riggs, \$600; Savanna Chase Davis, \$600; David Booth Sr., \$265; Joshua Aaron Vanderhoof, \$245.

DRIVING WHILE SUSPENDED

Michael Patrick O’Malley, \$1,258; Tanya Nannette Taylor, \$1,258; Itinderpuneet Singh, \$1,258; Cassandra Michelle Riggs, \$1,258; Savanna Chase Davis, \$1,258; Christopher Lee Haines, \$1,258; David Booth Sr., \$440; Robert Daniel Hampton, \$440; Jacob Carey Graber, \$492; Joshua Aaron Vanderhoof, \$395.

USE OF MOBILE DEVICE

Christopher Lee Haines, \$600; Bohdan Alexander Josep Rahm, \$265.

SPEEDING

Travis Duane Wilson, \$135; Debbie Eilene Endicott, \$150.

OTHER

Eric Christopher Castillo, dangerous left turn, \$265; Christopher Lee Haines, illegal alteration or display of plates, \$600; Sergey Ivanovich Marchuk, following too closely, \$235; Jacob Carey Graber, unregistered vehicle, \$115; Oscar Bautista Sosa, use of prohibited lighting, \$145; Miguel Mendez Strait, \$395.

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