

# Walkers Prepare for Hood to Coast

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FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

If you hear laughter, teasing and shouts of encouragement ring through the air followed by strains of the famous "Rocky" theme song or Aretha Franklin's little known song with Annie Lenox "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves," you must have come upon a serious training session of the Soleful Strutters and Struttin' Sole Sistahs as they prepare for their second appearance in this weekend's internationally renowned Hood to Coast relay race.

Known previously as the Soleful Strutters, this year the teams decided to have separate identities while they continue to plan and prepare for the race together.

This push for physical fitness started as the brainchild of Sharon Steen who served as a massage therapist for a corporate running relay team. Steen was excited by the dedication and accomplishment of the teams but was disappointed when she realized that there were few people of color among the participants.

Steen put out a call to her friends to check them for interest in being a part of the walking portion of the race, the Portland to Coast. She pointed out that the race was an excellent way to help raise awareness for physical fitness in the African American community and it's for a good cause—donations raised by the racers benefit the American Cancer Society.

Steen was thrilled to find that there were more than enough women interested in participating as the races' first all African American team. The response was so great that two 12-member teams participated as The Soleful Strutters I and II.

The Soleful Strutters were not among the first teams to finish the race; nor were they the last; but all of the walkers, volunteers and supporters along the 128 mile route knew the Strutters were a force to be reckoned with! The teams pep-

## Driven by community, fun and good health

pered the air with hoots, hollers and high fives. Strains of the "Rocky" theme song could be heard, along with "sistah chants" about walking, strutting and showing their stuff. By mid-race, other teams were joining the fun and singing the teams' theme song. Thought of as one huge team, the unity and enthusiasm of the Soleful Strutters was so great that they were unoffi-

workouts and enthusiasm from last year, over two-thirds of the participants have returned for a repeat performance. The two teams are family: literally and figuratively. The returning Soleful Strutters, dressed in black pants with gold shirts and hats emblazoned with a pony-tailed walker, are team captain, Jackie Jones along with her mother, Bernadine Clay; sister, Kawana

team has two returning pairs of sisters: Gahlana Easterly and Donna Maxey, as well as Jennifer Duncan and Edwina Wasson. Seasoned walkers Phyllis Spaulding, Jackie Temple and Kathy Woods round out the team with new "sistahs" Emma Ford, Adrienne Nelson, Chris Poole-Jones and Zenata Pierre. The Struttin' Sole Sistahs are lead by returning mem-

bers covered by black windbreakers and pants which were donated by the African American Health Coalition.

Now in its 24<sup>th</sup> year, the Hood to Coast has over 12,000 entrants and is the largest relay race in North America with participants from several foreign countries, as well. Broken into 36 legs, the route winds 197 miles from Timberline Lodge on Mt.

Struttin' Sole Sistahs team captain, Karen Talton solicited the support of the African American Health Coalition to help the Sistahs and Strutters maintain their racing form throughout the year by participating in Coalition sponsored activities. Along with other members of the community, the walkers attend exercise classes at the Mallory Avenue Baptist Church on Alberta either in the mornings at 6 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday and various classes Monday through Friday in the evenings.

Also on the exercise calendar are walks with in the evenings on Tuesday and Thursdays as well as Saturdays. Exercise gurus Ralph Nickerson, Georgann Pierce and Kathy Woods have kept the walkers in top shape and ready for the 25-hour race. These strutting sisters walk between 5-8 miles as they prepare to tackle the mountain range between here and the coast. They can be seen walking near Lloyd Center, around the Whitaker track, the streets of northeast and the hills of southwest near OHSU.

Soleful Strutters team captain, Jackie Jones, prevailed upon Thomason Auto Group to sponsor the walkers again this year. Thomason has donated four vans for the team's use during the race. The vans are an integral part of the race since the teams ride the route as walkers rotate in and out of the vans to cover their respective legs.

Gloria McMurtry, owner of The Talking Drum Bookstore, is also back as a sponsor this year. Talking Drum Bookstore, located at 446 N.E. Killingsworth, hosts the Soleful Sistahs the morning of the race as they gather for pep talks and prayer before leaving to make their 4:30 a.m. starting time under the Hawthorne Bridge.

A primary force behind the participants is the benefits of walking on your health, including weight loss, reduction of high blood pressure, relief from symptoms of diabetes and better digestion.



Some of the local walkers preparing for this weekend's Hood to Coast relay include (from left) Kawana Vincent, Karen Talton, Altrina Walker-Jones, Kathy Woods, Bernadine Clay, Gahlana Easterly, Sherra Neal, Donna Maxey and Jackie Jones.

cially proclaimed "The Most Enthusiastic" group. The Soleful Strutters obvious excitement and good cheer was even honored at a coast restaurant by another walking team who serenaded the Strutters after dinner with their own rendition of the Strutters' theme song.

These sistah's are doin' it for themselves. Still high from the great

Vincent; and new member, sister-in-law, Altrina Walker-Jones. Filling out the team are veteran walkers Arlena Barnes, Carol Chism, Maxine Fitzpatrick, Joyce Maxwell, Sherra Neal, and Dru Rudolph. New to the Strutters are Lissa Guildon and Georgann Pierce.

Sporting the new name of Struttin' Sole Sistahs, the second

ber, team captain, Karen Talton whose daughter, Kayin Talton of Soapbox Theory Designers developed the team's logo SSS in the form of three women with ample "sistah" features. The Struttin' Sole Sistahs, who displayed their fancy footwork in the "Good in the (Neighbor) Hood parade this summer, can be seen in their white shirts and

Hood to the coastal beach at Seaside's Promenade. Each leg of the race is rated from very hard to very easy depending on the terrain, length and difficulty of the route. Runners are responsible for three legs of the race while each walker completes two legs of the 128 miles they cover in the Portland to Coast segment.

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