

MAYOR'S SCHOOL WALKING CHALLENGE:

EMMETT MAYOR
GORDON PETRIE

SMALL STEPS TO A BIG TRANSFORMATION

When Emmett Mayor Gordon Petrie first committed to the Mayor's School Walking Challenge, he saw it as an opportunity to raise funds for his local middle school. But it became a catalyst for something much bigger.

Mayor Gordon Petrie is a part-time mayor with full-time commitment. So when the opportunity to raise money to improve the health of Emmett school children came along, he was up for the challenge.

What he didn't realize at the time is that the Mayor's School Walking Challenge — a one-month event that encourages students and Mayors to lace up their sneakers and get moving — would inspire a personal and citywide emphasis on improved health.

An initiative of the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, the Mayor's School Walking Challenge outfitted mayors across the state of Idaho with Fit-Bits, an internet-enabled pedometer that accurately tracks calories burned and the number of steps taken each day. The mayors are encouraged to walk with schoolchildren who also track their walking during the month. Those with the most steps win grant funds that can be used on food service and physical activity equipment.

A former judge, Army officer and councilman, Mayor Petrie had both the will and the skill to win the competition.

"The secret is you have to plan out the day," explains Mayor Petrie, who by the end of the month logged 534 miles, an average of 17 miles each day. "That means getting out at o-dark-thirty and putting in an easy five or six miles in the morning. Then throughout the day I would do anywhere from two to four mile increments."

To reach his goal, Mayor Petrie integrated the Challenge into every part of his life. Meetings with city staff members were moved from the office to the park across the street from City Hall. He stopped

QUICK FACTS

- *While participating in the MSWC, Mayor Petrie took note of the walkability challenges of his city, particularly for kids.*
- *The Mayor took action, joining regional & national organizations for resources and marshalling the resources of the city to improve conditions.*
- *The Mayor has a long-term vision, but short-term sense of urgency.*

"I like a good challenge," Emmett Mayor Gordon Petrie says with a grin. "The Mayor's School Walking Challenge (MSWC) seemed like a good way to win some money for our kids. So I jumped in."

driving to off-site meetings within town. On the last day, he even slept in shifts — starting his walking at midnight — to make sure he could maximize his number of steps.

The effort paid off.

Not only did Mayor Petrie win the 2015 Mayor’s School Walking Challenge, he personally lost 10 pounds and, he says, got a much closer look at the infrastructure challenges that made it difficult for kids in his community to get out and be active.

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— MAYOR PETRIE



“We have spots just a couple hundred yards from schools where the sidewalk ends and kids are forced to walk in the street,” he says. “We have to fix that.”

Inspired by the Mayor’s School Walking Challenge, Mayor Petrie is doing his best to do just that. He began attending conferences and workshops on creating a more walkable community. He joined Walking College, a program hosted by the national non-profit America Walks, that provides a host of resources to help him engage the entire Emmett community. And he engaged with the Looking Glass Academy, a program that enlists professional transportation and city-planning engineers to audit and facilitate planning sessions to improve the city’s walkability.

Mayor Petrie even named October 5th as the first annual Walk Your Child To and From School Day in Emmett. “I want the parents to see firsthand, like I have, the challenges their kids have simply walking to school.”

Hand in hand with all of this education and effort, the Mayor and his team at the city have a plan to replace or add sidewalks throughout Emmett.

“This is a long, hard slog,” Mayor Petrie says. “But we’re going to try to fix it. We owe it to our kids to fix it.”