



Scale Back Alabama kicks off sixth year, featuring *Biggest Loser* winners

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Today marks the kickoff of Scale Back Alabama, a statewide weight-loss contest designed to help Alabama fight obesity and to encourage participants to develop lifelong healthy habits. The program, now in its sixth year, has resulted in a total weight loss of nearly 760,000 pounds and healthier lifestyles for thousands of individuals.

In the last 15 years Alabama has seen its obesity rate double, and the state was recently named the second most obese state in the nation in a report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. More than 30 medical conditions are associated with obesity, including heart disease and diabetes, but adopting a healthy lifestyle can lower the risk of developing such diseases.

Today's news conference featured interviews with two University of Alabama graduates who know firsthand the benefits of making healthy choices. Olivia Ward won the 11th season *Biggest Loser* contest, and her sister, Hannah Curlee was first runner-up. The sisters lost a combined 249 pounds during the competition and now travel the country encouraging Americans to eat less and move more. During the 2012 Scale Back Alabama contest, they will share valuable advice with participants through weekly emails that offer health tips and encouragement.

"Programs like Scale Back Alabama highlight the necessity of making healthy choices," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "Even small changes can have a huge impact on an individual's weight and overall health."

Scale Back Alabama 2012 begins Jan. 21. The 10-week contest is free of charge and is targeted to adults 18 and older. It primarily focuses on the workplace and utilizes local businesses, schools and organizations as weigh-in sites. To participate, teams of four register and have their initial weigh in at a local site during the week of Jan. 21-27. Participants who complete the contest and are on a team in which every member loses at least 10 pounds are placed in a drawing for one of three grand prizes, the top prize being \$1,000 per team member.

“Scale Back Alabama has been the catalyst for thousands of people across the state to increase their physical activity and incorporate nutritious food into their diets,” said Donald Jones, Scale Back Alabama chairman and administrator of Marion Regional Medical Center in Hamilton, Ala. “It’s great to see Alabamians taking charge of their health and embracing healthier lifestyles.”

One of the more recent additions to the contest has been a school competition. “We have more than 50 K through 12 schools participating in this year’s contest,” said Dr. Williamson. “The school competition is an extension of the Health Department’s efforts to promote better health among teachers and faculty in the hopes that it will also affect the students. It’s a similar approach to the overall campaign which has resulted in healthier families due to the emphasis on adults in the workplace.”

During the 10-week contest participants will not only receive useful information about diet and exercise, they will also be able to join in outdoor activities that promote healthy living. Each week Scale Back Alabama will provide information about events offered by Fresh Air Family, an Alabama-based organization that offers free and low-cost programs to promote exercise and the outdoors. Additionally, during the 10 weeks of the program, Alabama’s 22 state parks will offer a free one-day pass to Scale Back Alabama participants who show their weigh-in card.

To emphasize the importance of exercise and to prove that it can be fun, three participating organizations developed Scale Back Alabama dance routines that were showcased at the kickoff news conference and are posted on the Scale Back Alabama website. Other organizations participating in the contest are encouraged to create their own dances and send them to contest sponsors for the website.

Those interested in participating in the 2012 Scale Back Alabama contest can find weigh-in sites and additional information about the program at www.scalebackalabama.com.

Scale Back Alabama is sponsored by the Alabama Hospital Association and the Alabama Department of Public Health, with generous underwriting by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama.