

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 42: Staying Physically Active at Work, School and Around the Town

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Summary: Staying physically active can be a walk in the park – or to school, the workplace or around the town. The newest episode of the TSET Better Health Podcast features Stroud City Manager Bob Pearman speaking on the town's new attractions aimed at improving the health and longevity of residents; a wellness coordinator for state employees who shares tips and resources to help any workplace become a healthier environment, and a return to Webbers Falls, where students are gearing up for National Walk or Roll to School Day in early October.

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[Theme music]

James Tyree: Hello, greetings and welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is your host James Tyree, interim associate director of Integrated Communication at TSET ...

Dylan Jasna: And I am Dylan Jasna, TSET associate director of brands and campaigns. We welcome you to Episode 42 of the podcast, which will explore fresh ideas and innovations in wellness and physical activity at school, the workplace and around town. How innovative?

J. Tyree: Oh, like enlisting the help of cops **and** robbers to help entire communities become healthier! Keep listening to find out how these arresting developments unfolded. For now, just know that you don't need a gym membership or a ton of athletic ability – though both can be nice – to be more physically active. Just getting out and walking can go a long way toward improving health and feeling great.

D. Jasna: That is what two of today's guests had in mind – to improve the health of our kids and adults by doing things that encourage walking and simple but beneficial physical activity on a regular basis. One is an engaging and resourceful city manager in Lincoln County, the other is dedicated teacher in eastern Oklahoma who we wanted to revisit after meeting in an earlier episode. Later, we will hear from a workplace wellness coordinator for state employees who has excellent advice for any Oklahoman wanting to be and feel healthier, no matter where they work.

J. Tyree: Let's begin in Stroud, where podcast audio engineer Sam Carrillo and I recently visited to converse and take a downtown tour with its city manager. Sheri Ripley, a TSET Healthy Living Program coordinator in Lincoln County, joined us in the conversation.

Bob Pearman: My name is Bob Pearman. I've been the city manager here at Stroud for going on six years.

When I first came here, first started the job, there was an analysis on our health conditions in Stroud. It pointed out that we were probably one of the most unhealthy group of people in Lincoln County. So part of that was lack of exercise, foods that were available, those kind of things. It even resonated to the point that our life expectancy was two years less than everybody else in Lincoln County. So we started looking at that and trying to see what was the cause or where that came from. I know that that's not something that will happen in a short period of time and probably not with the generation that's here, it's probably generations to come, but we started looking at ways where we get people active and maybe start working on some of the things that we could immediately make a difference in.

J. Tyree: When you think about the health and longevity of the townspeople, that can seem really big, right? Oh my gosh, where do we start? How were you able to focus in on areas where improvements could be made over time?

B. Pearman: Well, you attack those things that you got control of. So that's kind of where we started with foods and sidewalks, parks, looking at different areas of town and plans and visions of how we can do that. So after ~~we actually sat down and...~~ Well, actually after I got over the being upset and frustrated about the fact that that was the condition that we were in, I kind of felt like, "Okay, now what are we going to do about it? Help me fix this problem."

But just getting them active, looking at our parks, looking at things that we could do, looking at our elementary schools, our kids, things that they would enjoy, things that we could immediately do that would make a difference in them being active and getting out. Hopefully when we get the kids doing that, the parents will follow and the grandparents, and then slowly but surely, we'll get everybody involved, hopefully.

J. Tyree: All right, so with that in mind, what are some of the improvements, the things that have come along that have helped with that?

B Pearman: We've done a lot of things up and down Main Street to get people walking and moving up and down Main Street. Part of it is history walk or veterans walk, our double bank robbery, those kinds of things that we've set up and down Main Street where you can walk down Main Street and see all these different things, do a little history walk of what Main Street was at one time, what it is now. But we've done things like at the pool, we've purchased new slides with some of our ARPA money, new playground equipment. We've lighted up volleyball court. We put basketball goals on the tennis court, so it would be dual purpose and lit that up at night so kids would be able to utilize that.

(04:22): We've built a couple of disc golf courses in town that not only gets the kids involved, but gets adults. We built one that challenged each age group. We built a par three course for the kids down in the park, close to the elementary school, and we built a challenging course at the lake, which is a pro level course that takes you a few hours to

finish that. We've also done things like repaired sidewalks and we are working on building a new sidewalk out to our retail stores, partially as a safety aspect to get people away from the highway, walking down the highway or beside the highway, but give them an avenue to retail that's safe and easy access.

J. Tyree: Wow, that's a lot going on here, Bob. It really is. I wanted to talk a little bit more about the walking opportunities. You mentioned double bank robbery walk and the veterans walk. What do people see when they come across these specific walks here?

B. Pearman: We've got signs, thanks to TSET, put on both ends of Main Street, where it guides them to the different things that are going on and breaks it down in different steps and how far it is and promotes the being active and walking.

Sheri Ripley: Tell him about the double bank robbery.

B. Pearman: The double bank robbery was something that happened in 1912.

J. Tyree: OK

B. Pearman: Some guys came into town and their plan was to rob both banks at the same time and do that. So we've put some metal silhouettes, cut out silhouettes at both banks and put a story there that you can see what happened and what the outcome was on that and their escape route. It's just one of the different things that you can do.

Some of the teachers built a pocket park over on Main Street that's directed directly at children. I've seen parents there with their kids and there's little things like turn circles or hop or jump three times or walk this way or walk that way, just something to get them moving and get them active in a little park. There was nothing else there at the time. We've got a mural painted there now and a couple benches. It's just a place to go and you can sit and watch your kids play and be active. We've drawn out a couple parks in town and so each time we do that, we draw in a walking trail.

It hasn't been completed yet, but we're working on that. We try to direct a lot of the things that we do towards children to get them active, to get them involved. Part of that is we've purchased and we don't have it put up yet, but a story time where we have different areas where they can walk and be a place for them to stop and read a story or read a couple pages and move on to the next stage and read the next couple pages. But as they go around the park, it enables them to do that, kind of a little bit of education along with that and get them reading and get them walking. Dual purpose there being the teacher in all of us.

J. Tyree: There you go. That sounds like a lot of fun. So ~~people can get out and walk~~, people of all ages can get out and walk, but also be entertained or learn something along the way. About what is the distance when people are walking on Main Street and see these things from one end to the other? Do you know about what that distance is?

B. Pearman: A little over 900 steps.

S. Ripley: It's a half a mile one way. If you go the whole Main Street, it's almost a mile.

J. Tyree: It's hard, if not impossible, to do things alone. So you mentioned the TSET Healthy Living program. How has the HLP been helpful in making these things more a healthier environment for your community?

B. Pearman: How about you answering that?

S Ripley: Well, first of all, it helps that we have a champion in Bob, that he's willing to do these things. He's willing to fund things and come up with ideas. He's gone different places and seen things and came back with those ideas. The silhouettes for the double bank robbery are just amazing. Then we came up with the idea of the wayfinding signage because there were so many things on Main Street and Main Street is on Route 66, so we wanted to give opportunity for tourists to stop also. So they have wayfinding signage down at the intersection of Highway 99 and 66 and TSET funded that wayfinding signage and we worked to make the signs and get them to Bob, and then Bob ended up funding the pole to put the signs on and the men to install all those signs. Then there's another sign down Main Street at the Ed Smalley Park where there's a gazebo.

There is a bugle boy there statue where the Christmas trees go. There's an old Stroud house. The Lucas House is there in that area. So it's a neat little park area there, and it's right next to the infamous Rock Cafe where the movie, Cars, was a part of that movie.

S. Ripley: And policy-wise, anything that we've said, "This would be a good idea for the community," he's been willing to go along with us and take policies to City Council to make Stroud a healthier community here. He just comes up with some of the greatest ideas. The pocket park was one of those things. A man that owned a store right there in that area owned that little plot of land and Bob talked to him and he was willing to donate that property to build the pocket park.

J. Tyree: And you guys did the walking maps around town?

S Ripley: Yes, yes. We have an epidemiologist with the health department that allowed... We brought her over and she rode with us and we were able to make some walking trail maps. We made one for the north side of Route 66 and we made another map for the south side of Route 66. We just went through the neighborhoods and came up with distances and put them on a map that people could walk and would be a good safe place for people to walk. Then we had those maps made and we've put them in those neighborhoods and we've put the big maps throughout town so people can see where they can go and walk and be safe. If they want to walk a mile, they can go here or they can look and see, "This is close to my house, I can walk here." So that's been a great thing too, and we were very appreciative of Amrita for helping us with those maps.

J. Tyree: That's terrific. So from the start of the very first project to now, about how many years is that? Four or five years?

B. Pearman: It's probably been four years.

J. Tyree: Yeah. Well, I imagine there are a number of city leaders, community folks who would like to just see these sorts of things to help their communities to be healthier, more walkable and stuff like that. Is there a tip or two that you would give to how you get started and how you continue it?

B. Pearman: Well, I mean, part of it is you just have a good team to work with, and TSET's been a good team. My guys have always been on board that works here. They put up with all the crazy things I ask them to do and always been good about that. Some of the things... We're not above stealing something from another town that would work for us. And so every time I go somewhere, I'm looking at what they're doing and I keep thinking to myself, "Well, that would work well at home." So some of these things we've brought from somewhere else that other leaders are doing someplace else that works for us.

J. Tyree: There you go. It's hard to pick whether Stroud is becoming a healthier place to live or a fun and interesting place to live because of all these things. Which is it?

B. Pearman: A whole lot of both. I mean that's kind of our goal.

[Music]

D. Jasna: What an interesting story and a good example of community partnerships and creativity coming together to create a healthier place to live for everyone. And now I get the robbers' reference, as twin landmarks of interest for pedestrians in downtown Stroud.

I like what Bob said when asked whether Stroud is becoming a town that is healthier or more fun, and he said both. And he is right – physical activity and having a great time go hand in hand so very often.

J. Tyree: Yep, and that is the goal in Webbers Falls, where its schools where participate in Walk or Roll to School Day.

D. Jasna: Wait, didn't we talk about this event in Webbers Falls in an episode a few months ago?

J. Tyree: Pretty much, but not exactly. We did talk with a Webbers Falls teacher and coach last spring about the Bike or Roll to School Day that was coming up in early May, but now they are gearing up for Walk or Roll to School Day, which happens nationally in October.

D. Jasna: I wonder how Bike and Roll to School Day went in May and how it will compare to their upcoming walking event. I'd also be curious to know if those special days are making a difference for kids and even adults on the other 363 days of the year.

J. Tyree: Dylan, I think our listeners would ask the same questions, which is exactly why I wanted to check back in with the same great teacher and coach in rural Muskogee County that we met on the podcast earlier this year.

M. Johnson: My name is Meghan Johnson and at Webbers Falls, I am a math teacher. I am a cross country coach, and I am the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods liaison, and I direct the afterschool program.

J. Tyree: What grades do you teach and coach?

M. Johnson: We are so small. We have one building that's pre-K through 12, and I teach grades six through 11. And then for cross country, I coach grades 3 through 12.

J. Tyree: So before we discuss Walk or Roll to School Day, tell us about the Bike or Roll to School Day that your school held in May. How did things go?

M. Johnson: It was amazing. The weather was perfect. We start at Webbers Falls City Park on the river, so we get to watch the sunrise over the Arkansas River, which is just a beautiful, gorgeous setting. And it was the second time we had done it and we had even more people involved, more parents involved. And the Chamber of Commerce came out and helped us with just making sure the whole thing came off safely, as well as some citizens around the town that had seen it happening in the fall and wanted to be a part of that excitement in May, so it really grew. So it was really exciting to have even more people in May because I thought last October that we had peaked out as far as the number of people involved, but we had even more people involved in May. So yeah, it was great.

J. Tyree: So you had a Walk to School Day last year before Bike to School Day in May. About how many students participated in the most recent event?

M. Johnson: We have approximately 300 students in the school, and I'm going to say we had at least 200 participate. Yeah, we had a very, very high percentage participate. There's some that don't have the option. A lot of our high school students are concurrent students, or they go to vo-tech, so they don't start their day on campus, but a large percentage of our pre-K through eighth graders participated in this, so it was exciting.

J. Tyree: What will be the same – or different – for the upcoming Walk or Roll to School Day compared to the bicycling and skating event?

M. Johnson: So our route is going to be the same. We'll still start at the city park and walk our established course, but there's just some new things that have happened after our first Walk and Bike to School event.

J. Tyree: Oh yeah? Like what?

M. Johnson: We passed a Safe Routes to School resolution with the help of Tiffany and TSET and Doug.

J. Tyree: Tiffany Tolbert and Doug Walton are with the TSET Healthy Living Program serving Muskogee County.

M. Johnson: They came in and helped us do that with the city. We got new school zone signs that are much more visible, much brighter yellow. We have new speed limit signs. We have crosswalks on the road now and so those are great just to make it safer, so those will be in addition. To that, we have changed the drop off where parents drop the students off

so that that happens at a different place than where the students are and would be coming in walking or biking to school just to increase that safety.

J. Tyree: That sounds great. So walking around town is better and safer for students year-round.

M Johnson: One thing that's exciting for me about this October is for cross country practice, the Booster Club bought me a bike so that I can keep up with my cross country runners. So I get to ride the bike on our Roll to School Day this year, our Walk and Roll to School. But also because I've had my cross country students on the road, I have a bigger team this year as that continues to grow, our town is becoming far more aware of kids walking to and from the park as we go to that park from the school to practice. And that's also increasing the student awareness that we have a walkable, bikeable community. I think we're going to have more students involved this year and a safer event as members of the town are increasingly aware of students coming to and from the school at all times during the day.

We have three brand new teachers, two of which are PE teachers or coaches, and we have two new principals and a new counselor. So I'm excited to have them see this mass amount of student participation in this Walk to School event to show them how much we as Webbers Falls Public School really value physical activity and just showcase the community that we have built here as they see all of this support from the town and the police department and the sheriff's department. And we'll have some Oklahoma State troopers there, as well as people from the OSU extension and TSET and just this huge amount of community that supports our students and supports them being outside and walking and being physically active.

J. Tyree: It sounds like momentum is really building for Webbers Falls to become a safer and more inviting town for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages

M. Johnson: The safety and awareness is crazy. I remember when I first moved to Webber going for a run and having people pull over and ask me if I needed a ride because in Webbers Falls it just didn't happen. And so this event and just the massive amount... You can't ignore as a driver, you can't ignore when all five of our police are there plus the county sheriff plus Oklahoma State troopers. That attracts a lot of attention of these drivers, and so they see that, and that, I think, is so much to increase their awareness. Plus the traffic is being stopped as we have this huge mob of 250 kids, 200 kids come to school. So it has done so much for their awareness, but I've also seen, especially in the last six months, a lot more people of the town out walking, more people that come down to the park on their own and are walking that I've ever seen before. So I'm excited that not only is these events of walking or biking to school increasing awareness that there's people on our streets, but I think it's also encouraging just the community members themselves to be out and part of the community that walks and bikes. And nobody stops and offers me a ride anymore. They know I'm just that crazy to go out for a run!

[Music]

D. Jasna: It's amazing to hear how popular the National Walk and Roll to School and Bike and Roll to School Day events are becoming in Webbers Falls, **and** how those events and partnerships with the TSET Healthy Living Program in Muskogee County and other community members are creating a culture of people of walking and biking – and just being more physically active.

And yes, between the law enforcement assisting with the Walk and Bike events in Webbers Falls and the double bank robbery metal silhouette landmarks in Stroud, we now get the earlier reference to how cops and robbers are part of innovative ways to encourage physical activity.

J. Tyree: The 27th annual National Walk and Roll to School Day takes place on Wednesday, Oct. 4, and heading into the final week of September, 17 schools in Oklahoma registered their event with the national website at <https://walkbiketoschool.org> – though many other schools in our state will participate without the national registration. Check out that website, and if you live in a county with a TSET Healthy Living Program grant, we certainly encourage you to contact their staff to learn more on what is being done locally to improve health and wellness for youth and everyone and how you can get involved.

D. Jasna: We've heard how communities and schools can encourage physical activity and overall wellness, but this is also important and achievable in the workplace, wherever that may be. Let's meet someone who can tell us more about workplace and employee wellness.

S. Robinson: (00:13) Hi. I'm Susan Robinson and I am the State Government Employee Wellness Program Coordinator. The program is called Thrive. I've been with the state since 2006 and working in the wellness program. I want to start with the main reason the program exists and what our goal is, is to empower state employees to improve and enhance their overall wellbeing, not just their physical health but their overall wellbeing. My new mantra now is to have the healthiest state government workforce in the nation.

D. Jasna: That's a good mantra, one I can appreciate! What are some ways that you and Thrive are working to achieve this?

S. Robinson: One that I started during COVID was break time. Everybody was working from home. Some were in the office but most were at home. I even found myself, sometimes when we had to work from home, working 'til nine o'clock at night. Some people told me that they would sit there all day and never get up, and so that's why we developed break time, and break time is something that is still ongoing. I lead employees through desk stretches, and then stress management is kind of my specialty so I also include a couple of relaxation breathing techniques and then I give them a health tip.

Another big one that we were still sort of been able to continue even through COVID was our recreation leagues. Recreation is very good to touch many areas of our health and wellness. One, your social health. Employees that participate in our recreation leagues, they meet and compete against other state employees from other agencies. Not only that, so that helps your social health but it helps your physical health because

you're getting movement and activity. But it also, research shows that it is one of the biggest stress relievers ever, so that's what I do.

D. Jasna: That sounds great – and helpful for employees. Is there anything new coming?

S Robinson: We're actually going to be launching Stress Stop. It is very, very stellar as far as going to all areas of stress and what all it offers as far as meditation, assessments, you can figure out where you need to work on, where your most stress is, but you're talking about walking programs. Somebody just a couple of weeks ago started saying, "Hey, let's start a walking club." So then boom, boom, boom, I started thinking and I was like, "Healthiest state workforce in the nation, I want to try to get our whole state employees involved in a walking program, walking together again, your physical health, your social health, and relieve stress.

D. Jasna: These are terrific resources for the state employees you are reaching out to, but are current state employees the only ones who can benefit?

S. Robinson: We included a new area of resource within the resources tab, 50 Plus, and that is because we want to have resources for our retirees. We don't want to forget about them. And then, there are employees that do have parents and grandparents that maybe could take advantage of that. We also have a YouTube channel and on that YouTube channel I have desk exercises that one of my interns recorded, and we finally have that up there. Also, what all the stretches and breathing that I do in break time, that's also on YouTube channel. We have social media. We try to reach people all over in many different ways, and so that's kind of our main thing that we have right now.

They can reach our YouTube channel from going to our website, which is just oklahoma.gov/thrive. At the very bottom of the website you will see the YouTube link. The podcast can be ... Actually, you can find it on many of the podcast ways, Google, Apple, it's kind of out there but you have to search for it, Thrive, and For the Health of It, and you should be able to find it.

D. Jasna; So once again, that website is Oklahoma.gov/thrive, and you don't have to be a state employee or related to one to access many of its resources. Susan, why do you think health and wellness is so important for employees, both during and outside of work?

S. Robinson: Well, the focus used to be on, what the term, ROI, return on investment and wellness programs and how it lowered healthcare claims and those kind of things but, to be honest, that's kind of old school now. The focus has shifted to VOI, which is value on investment. Research has shown that employees feel more valued when there is workplace wellness programs and more and more the seminars that I attend and everything that they talk about, employees are finally going, "Yeah, I need somebody to care about my mental health. I need somebody to be interested in me as an employee." And so, when employees feel valued that means more employee engagement and, again, more productivity. And so, when they feel better, they just work better and they do. When they participate in the programs, I've heard comments time and time again, especially in break time, how like, "Oh, I needed that, that was so good for me."

Some even were able to stop going to physical therapy because I was doing some of the same stretches that I've actually gotten from physical therapists. But all of that, no matter what, any program, whether it be TSET, Shape Your Future, City/County Health Department's Total Wellness Program, even in cities and counties all over the state, they have to feel valued. That's where you're going to get more engagement, I think, is when those citizens and employees feel valued. And so, that's what I think about actually when I think of workplace wellness, I mean, it's the whole thing where they feel valued, and that they want to participate, and that they know that it's offered for them, that we work hard to do these programs for them. And so, that's what my term is far as work site wellness.

D. Jasna: That is very well put. Thrive is a terrific program for state employees and all Oklahomans, and we thank you for your time and insights on workplace wellness.

S. Robinson: There are many good programs out there. What you guys offer, Shape Your Future. In fact, I use some of your resources and get that out to the state employees. And TSET, helping people come off tobacco, those are so important and it takes all of us, all of us who have programs, it takes all of us collaborating together because it takes a village to change people and change health behavior. And so, anyway, we all care about Oklahomans, in general, I think. I believe that's all of our goals.

[Music]

J. Tyree: I agree with you, Dylan, Susan gave us some helpful insights on workplace wellness and I appreciate her view on devoting time and attention to it as a "value on investment." I think the same can be said of improving the health of our children in schools and residents in our cities and towns – all to improve the length and quality of life.

D. Jasna: That also describes the core mission at TSET. Susan Robinson mentioned Shape Your Future, the TSET brand that helps Oklahomans of all ages improve health where we live, learn, work and play through Shape Your Future. I invite you to visit shapeyourfutureok.com to check out its abundant tips and resources.

J. Tyree: This has been fun and informative, and we hope you have enjoyed listening to this episode. Great things are happening through our state to create healthier environments and we thank our guests for sharing their stories with us.

D. Jasna: You can listen to any past episode by visiting Oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast, or anywhere you normally listen to podcasts. And we'll be back with you in November, right before the holidays, with our next episode. So until next time, this is Dylan Jasna ...

J. Tyree: And James Tyree wishing you peace

D. Jasna: And better health.