

Photo courtesy Sheryl Cook & Craig Kelly, City of Wylie.



Sheryl Cook won the Walk Across Texas competition at the Wylie Recreation Center, dropping 120 pounds.

Wylie Resident Walks the Walk

by Judy Truesdell

On her first attempt, Sheryl Cook couldn't even walk around Wylie Recreation Center's track one time without stopping to rest.

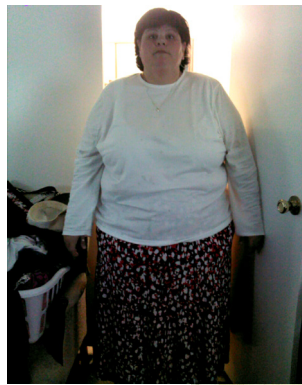
To say she came a long way in the 10 weeks that followed is true in more ways than one; the Wylie resident successfully walked the requisite 830 miles in the Walk Across Texas Fitness Challenge competition sponsored by the rec center, proving to herself she had the stamina and resolve to make it happen. In fact – she won.

"Participants were given from Jan. 4 to March 13 to walk the 830 miles it takes to get from El Paso to Texarkana," said Brittany Williams, recreation programmer at the rec center. "Sheryl completed the journey first – ahead of the 60 others who participated in the event. It was quite a feat!"

Although participants could sign up in teams, Sheryl wanted to go this one alone. "I wanted to do this just for me, to give myself a boost and an incentive. I never thought in a million years that I would win! I wasn't in it to win it – I just wanted a way to motivate myself."

When she signed up to participate in Walk Across Texas, she weighed in at 375 pounds. "I couldn't even make it around the track once without a break," she recalled. "But I didn't want to give up. People on the track were running circles around me, but I went a little farther each day."

Soon she was jogging, increasing her total distance on the track from mere feet and inches to 5 miles a day, four to five days a week. "At first, I didn't stay long or do much; as I got more comfortable with it, I found I could walk a little bit farther."



Sheryl Cook takes another lap around the track at the Wylie Recreation Center.

Rec center staff initialed logs for each participant, and pictures of all the competitors were push-pinned to a giant Texas map on the wall, tracking their progress as they moved "across the state."

Now Sheryl weighs 255 and, since she said she has another 100 pounds yet to lose, she has modified the way she cooks and eats – no small accomplishment for a former chef who loved to fry everything. "I now eat lots of fruits and vegetables. My whole way of thinking about food has totally changed. It has to when you do something like this competition." She skips fast food and sodas, opting instead for healthful fare and water. "I bet I drink a gallon of water a day," she said.

Sheryl goes to the rec center first thing in the morning and runs from 5:30 or 6 to 7:30 am, listening to her favorite country tunes on her phone. "I get it done first thing in the morning, because I'm afraid something will come up later in the day if I put it off, and I'll find an excuse not to go."

No doubt many things do come up throughout the course of a day; in addition to her husband of 16 years, Lance Cook, she takes care of her mom, who lives with the fam-

ily and also her adult daughter, who had complications from a childhood fall.

And on the occasional bad day, when Sheryl doubts her ability to handle life's challenges, she remembers the Walk Across Texas. "Winning this made me feel so good about myself. Every time I feel like quitting, I think about it and realize if I could do that, then I can complete other goals. I think about it every day." •