

NEW ULM, MINNESOTA

it takes a village



This is the story of how the people in one small city are banding together to make health a priority. They are on a 10-year mission to move more, eat better, and reduce heart attacks—and it's working!

PRODUCED BY Jessie Shafer | WRITTEN BY Hope S. Warshaw, RD, CDE
PHOTOS BY Kathryn Gamble | BEAUTY STYLING BY Mary-Kate Gales



Home of beer, brats, and butter, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a quaint small city a couple hours south of Minneapolis populated by about 14,000 people, many of German ancestry. "Our German heritage put beer, brats, and butter on the menu too often, widened our waistlines, and escalated our heart disease risk factors," says Rebecca Fliszar, RD, a community dietitian.

But in 2008, the town leaders decided to do something that would impact New Ulm and its residents for years to come. They designated their community's health as a top priority and began taking action by installing sidewalks and parks. At the same time, Kevin Graham, M.D., former cardiologist and president at the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation, and

Dick Pettingill, former CEO of Allina Health System, who both knew coronary artery disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and worldwide, were planning a long-term community project to reduce risk factors for heart disease and, ultimately, reduce incidences of heart attacks. To implement the project, they were looking for a community that was ready and willing to change.

The heart of New Ulm

Even though New Ulm had heart disease and diabetes risk factors a bit higher than national averages, choosing this town had more to do with vision and infrastructure than diet and disease risk. New Ulm already had support and facilities in place, and Graham, who traveled there for years as a cardiologist,

50%
Nearly half of the town population was at risk of or living with prediabetes or diabetes **when the project began.**





MAYOR, CITY OF NEW ULM, MINNESOTA

Bob Beussman

“Before the Heart of New Ulm project, I had quadruple-bypass heart surgery. My family and I went through a lot of pain and worry. If this project can prevent even one family from going through that experience, this will be worth it. But I know many more families that are and will be healthier because of this project. I’m so proud to be a part of it.”

“Some of us need a wake-up call before we realize we should take better care of ourselves.” —Mayor Bob, PWD type 2

knew firsthand that if the residents of New Ulm bought into this program, they’d ensure its success. Another key factor: The New Ulm Medical Center, part of Allina Health’s electronic health-records system, contained data on more than 90 percent of the New Ulm population. The project was named Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm.

The program starts

New Ulm, in essence, is a big petri dish. “Our mantra for the project is ‘Innovate, demonstrate, replicate’—test and learn what works best in New Ulm, then replicate programs and models of care to create healthy communities throughout America,” says Jackie Boucher, RD, CDE, director of the Heart of New Ulm.

The project is integrating healthy living habits into every nook and cranny of people’s lives. The goal: “Prevent heart attacks from happening by creating a healthy culture that supports people’s efforts to prevent or manage modifiable cardiovascular risk factors, including elevated glucose levels,” says Charles Stephens, M.D., the Heart of New Ulm local medical director. This makes sense not only from a disease perspective but from a financial one, too. Heart disease is a big driver of health care costs across the country. In addition, by reducing the risk factors for heart disease, the community will also be reducing incidences of type 2 diabetes, kidney disease, and certain cancers.

▶ Watch our interview with Mayor Bob and see why he loves New Ulm: DiabeticLivingOnline.com/Heart

All hands on deck

To transform a community into one where healthy living reigns supreme calls for an all-hands-on-deck approach. The Heart of New Ulm employs staff housed in both New Ulm and the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation. But raising awareness, doing screenings, holding events, and more takes, yes, a village. Support now comes from all sectors of the community, including employers, government leaders, health care providers, and hundreds of citizens. “We have district leaders who, as volunteers, generate ongoing programming and ideas, and help locate instructors, materials, and supplies to make events happen,” Fliszar says.

One community member who’s joined the Heart of New Ulm brigade of activists is George Cottom, owner of George’s Fine Steaks & Spirits, a downtown restaurant.

George has had type 1 diabetes for 25 years and is an avid runner. He’s involved in the initiative to get restaurants to offer healthier menu items based on nutrition guidelines that include more vegetables and fruits, whole grains, healthier fats, and smaller portions.

“No sweat; our healthy items are easy to make and are profitable, too. I win and New Ulmites win,” George says. “To see people take the Heart of New Ulm project to heart fills me with pride. After all, we’re just a little German community.”

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CHEF AND RESTAURANT OWNER

George Cottom

“When the directors of the Heart of New Ulm project approached me to ask if I could add some heart-healthy recipes to my menu, I said, ‘Of course!’ I have type 1 diabetes, so I know how important it is to know what’s in a serving.”

“I have a lot of customers who love the healthier food choices.”

—George, PWD type 1



The 10-Year Plan to Prevent Heart Attacks

2008

The program launches. A steering committee with key community leaders is put in place. New Ulm holds its first Community Summit. The word is out: 94 percent of New Ulm residents become aware of the heart-healthy project.

2009

5,200 New Ulm residents are screened for heart disease risk factors. Healthy-cooking classes start, and residents can watch and participate in a locally produced healthy-cooking TV show called *What’s Cooking New Ulm?*

2010

A new FoodWorks program encourages restaurants to make their menus healthier. Participating eateries are recognized with stickers on front windows. After 15 months, heart attacks drop 24 percent compared with the months prior to the program.





DIRECTOR, HEARTS BEAT BACK

Jackie Boucher, RD, CDE

"I think some of what motivates and engages the residents of New Ulm is knowing that they are a model community for what can become a health movement across the nation. Throughout this study we want to create some innovative programs, and we've already been showing that many of them work."

"Our goal is to make the healthy choice the easy choice." —Jackie

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Health in surround sound

Motivational messages and healthy options are all over in New Ulm—where people work, play, shop for food, and dine out. "Change is evident everywhere," Fliszar says. More people are walking, health club memberships have skyrocketed, work sites are smoke-free, and health challenges have engaged thousands of New Ulm residents. Among them is Nadine Bode, a colon cancer survivor who is at risk for type 2 diabetes. She's gotten the walking bug, and both she and her dog (who loves the new daily strolls) are benefitting. With exercise and medication, her LDL (bad) cholesterol and her blood glucose are down to normal.

Nadine, who works nights and early mornings at a convenience store, sees the progress firsthand. "People have traded pastry for fruit because it's available and they're more conscious," she says. Signs and brochures placed in several New Ulm convenience stores encourage customers to make more healthful drink and snack swaps.

Another system implemented as part of the Heart of New Ulm project is HeartBeat Connections, a telephone-based coaching program. It offers one-on-one support for people at high risk for heart disease, as well as those already diagnosed with diabetes or heart disease. Nadine was selected for this program based on her elevated LDL and glucose level. Forty percent of

▶ Watch our interview with the doc to learn how healthy can be the norm: DiabeticLivingOnline.com/Heart



people invited signed up. "My coach and I talk every six weeks to set goals and determine the need for treatment changes," Nadine says.

Health care providers are changing their ways as well. "We've amassed huge buy-in for the project," Stephens says. Through seminars and improvement projects, they learn about national guidelines and how to optimize treatments, and they sing the same healthy living tune to residents. Providers are thrilled to already see everyone's efforts paying off with greater fruit and vegetable consumption, less smoking, lower blood pressure, and lower glucose levels. "A big success is, on average, people have slowed their curve of weight gain," Stephens says.

It's just easier now

As the Heart of New Ulm project continues another six years, organizers continue to add and adjust programs, Fliszar says. New in 2012 is increased promotion and awareness of the New Ulm farmer's market and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs to up people's servings of fruits and vegetables. "It's an experiment. We're continually analyzing, learning, and refining," Boucher says. Stephens calls the program "infectious" and notes they're seeing a mass shift, or tipping point, in what's now "normal" behavior in New Ulm. Nadine puts it simply: "Staying healthier has just become easier." And that's exactly what needs to happen across America, one community at a time.

FAMILY PRACTICE PHYSICIAN, ALLINA MEDICAL CENTER

Charles Stephens, M.D.

"I have patients who say, 'Hey, Doc, did you notice I lost 10, 20, 50 pounds?' When I ask them how they did it, they say, 'I quit eating the extra junk I didn't need,' or 'I just decided it was time.' It's important that people know it's their choice to make a difference in their own health."



"This project is like a critical-mass bicycle ride. If you get enough bikes out there, they can take over the street." —Dr. Stephens

2011

Convenience stores join the heart-health initiative by posting information about healthier snack and beverage choices. Participation increases at two 4-mile walk/run events.



2012

Promotion of the heart-healthy benefits of eating fruit and vegetables increases. Residents are encouraged to participate in community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs and to shop at the New Ulm farmer's market.

2013–2017

Program initiatives continue with an emphasis on establishing more tobacco-free work sites and parks, expansion of restaurant and grocery store programs, and coaching for residents who are overweight.

2018

The End Goal: The Heart of New Ulm project will be fully integrated into the community and heart attack rates decrease. The successful and sustainable program can be replicated across the country.



NEW ULM RESIDENT AND WALK ORGANIZER

Nadine Bode

"I quit smoking, so whenever I wanted a cigarette I'd take my dog for a walk instead. Then I'd wonder, Why do I have so much free time now? So I got the walking bug and started signing up for 5Ks. My goal was always just to finish. And yes, a few times I was the last one, but I always finished."

"I never dreamed I'd be helping organize 5Ks. I didn't know it would be this much fun." —Nadine, prediabetes

Learn how New Ulm residents run their own healthy-cooking TV show: DiabeticLivingOnline.com/Heart

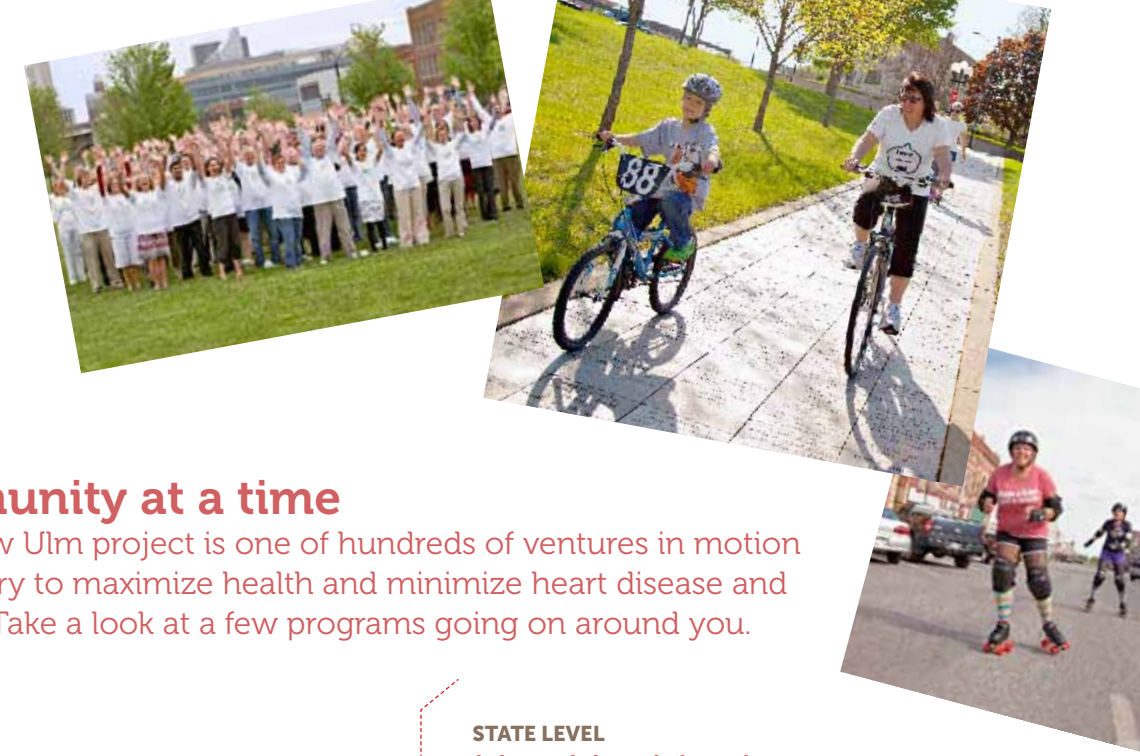


COMMUNITY INTERVENTION DIETITIAN

Rebecca Fliszar, RD

"We want to influence people everywhere they buy food, from information and guidance at grocery stores and restaurants to things like brochures with healthy snack ideas at convenience stores. We also provide follow-up support from dietitians who make phone calls and house visits."

"The way a person with diabetes should eat is the model we'd like everybody to follow." —Rebecca



One community at a time

The Heart of New Ulm project is one of hundreds of ventures in motion across the country to maximize health and minimize heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Take a look at a few programs going on around you.

COMMUNITY LEVEL

Diabetes Health and Wellness Institute in Dallas

The Diabetes Health and Wellness Institute (DHWI) opened in Dallas in 2010 after years of planning. The novel thing about this program is that it's housed at a recreation center accessible by public transportation, not a hospital. DHWI weaves diabetes prevention into the fabric of the community to make the services natural and convenient parts of daily life. People can see their health care providers, attend cooking classes, and work out in the gym. The program also has weekly farm stands that ease access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Go to dhwidallas.com to learn more.

STATE LEVEL

Live Healthy Iowa

Live Healthy Iowa started in 2001 as an initiative to make Iowa the healthiest state in America. The program brings together friends, families, coworkers, and communities in team-based wellness challenges. "Today, nearly 200,000 Iowans are living healthier and have lost over 800,000 pounds in just over a decade," says Nicole Bruce, health initiatives director of Live Healthy Iowa. Live Healthy Iowa led to the creation of Live Healthy America in 2006. Check out livehealthyiowa.org to learn more.

NATIONAL LEVEL

National Diabetes Prevention Program

The National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP), led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Diabetes Translation, is on a mission to prevent the progression from prediabetes to type 2. "Prediabetes affects 79 million Americans. The time for action is now," says Ann Albright, Ph.D., RD, director of the NDPP in Atlanta. At-risk individuals work with a lifestyle coach in a group setting to make modest behavior changes, improve food choices, and increase physical activity. Visit cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention to learn more.

What's going on in your backyard?

Look around, get involved. Do your part to create a country in which the healthy choice is the easy choice. It will make living with diabetes easier and prevent more type 2.

Find heart-healthy recipes and tips. DiabeticLivingOnline.com/Heart