

## Long Island dieters gained from their example



Bill and Jim Germanakos (NBC Photo)



LINDA FIVESON, Nutritionist (Long Island Weight Counseling, Inc. – Woodbury, N.Y.)

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As in years past, many Long Islanders are resolved to make do with less in 2008. Less candy. Less bread. Less cereal. Less fast food. Less coffee-latte-chai-infusions.

But this year, even those who turned to TV instead of exercise got a little extra encouragement from an unlikely source: "The Biggest Loser," a weight-losing contest where Long Island twins lost a combined 350 pounds.

"That gave me inspiration," said Lora Illery of Hempstead, a supervisor of home health aides. She watched the show occasionally while dieting last year. By exercising and eating fresh food, she exceeded her New Year's resolution last year and lost 74 pounds.

She said she turned around her health so much that she got under control the diabetes she had developed while pregnant eight years ago, and last year she was able to stop taking insulin and other diabetes medicine.

This year, Illery's resolution is more modest than last year's: "Just to keep my health good."

Her nutritionist, Linda Fiveson of Woodbury, is on a campaign to get Long Islanders to make similar resolutions. Fiveson said she's heard clients referring to the televised success of 41-year-old twins and season finale "Biggest Losers" Bill Germanakos from Lynbrook and Jim from Massapequa, and the previous winner, Eric Chopin of West Islip.

Losing weight always ranks high on people's lists of resolutions for the new year. In the past decade, more and more Americans have struggled to lose weight, and resolved to get fit. And it goes far beyond the inspiration of a TV show, experts point out.

By doing jumping jacks and ballroom dancing and eating healthful foods, Fiveson says she dropped her weight years ago from 258 to 127. "The problem is that we love foods we can eat out of boxes and cellophane bags," she said.

This time of year, she says, she sees clients who are desperate to get rid of weight added during the holidays as well as extra weight they've packed on for months or years.

"I just made a very boring resolution -- I never want to mess up my body again," said Sophia Yancopoulos, a writer at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research at the North Shore-LIJ Health System in Manhasset.

A former runner and swimmer, Yancopoulos has been helping a sick relative in recent months, and she thinks the stress has made her turn to sugary and carbohydrate-laden comfort snacks. She has a goal of losing 30 pounds in 2008.

"I want to eliminate white evil foods like sugar, flour and dairy," she said.

Another client, Mabel Vallejos of Patchogue, realized long ago that she has a common problem. "I don't want to be fat, but I love to eat." Last year, Vallejos was scared watching a friend suffering from the onset of type 2 diabetes. By eliminating sugar and flour from her diet and exercising regularly, Vallejos said, she lost 22 pounds. This year's resolution involves getting rid of 30 more.

In West Islip, Dr. Ciro Grello, a pediatrician, is happy whenever parents get their impetus from TV shows, magazines or friends. As long as they soak up the message.

"Every time I do a physical for a child, I do diet, nutrition and lifestyle counseling because we're faced with an epidemic of obesity," he said. He worries about high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.

Still, he also worries that reality TV shows lead to unrealistic expectations. He tells parents that children are doing great if they lose one pound a week -- and that means cutting out 500 calories a day.

As for two of the Long Islanders who have achieved fat-free fame on "The Biggest Loser," they now speak with the zeal of missionaries. "Last year, my resolution was to get back in shape," said Jim, a Freeport police officer.

He did that, and more, losing a total of 186 pounds by quitting smoking, constantly exercising and carefully watching his calories. Jim, who won \$100,000, now weighs 175.

This year's resolution? "I'm going to enjoy my newfound fitness with my family. I'll do all the things I couldn't do before, skiing, snowboarding, hiking, waterskiing, bike riding, enjoying the outdoors."

Bill, his twin, who works in medical and financial sales, made a resolution last year to get to a reasonable weight. He did all that and less, and he won the show's \$250,000 grand prize. He started at 334 pounds, lost 164, and now weighs 170. His 48-inch waist shrunk to 32 inches.

This year he has resolved to "follow through with what I've learned and to . . . educate people who were as unhealthy and obese as I was."

Oh, one more resolution. Both brothers pledge to keep up with each other -- or, to be more specific, they'll keep their weight down with each other. "The competition," Bill said as 2007 wound down, "has just begun."