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Taking Their Turn

Gardening, getting fit and gaining friends — one group in Kalamazoo offers all three to west Michigan women.

Your Turn, founded in 2010, is an organization for runners and others interested in learning more about health and wellness, said program director Melodie Holman. The group hosts running training from the beginner Couch-To-5K all the way to a springtime half-marathon program. They're preparing for Kalamazoo-area runs, like the Kalamazoo Klassic, though one woman took her Your Turn training to the New Zealand Ironman race.

Many women return every year for another season of running, alongside women who have never run before. Holman said each week, she makes sure runners are paired together in different combinations, so everyone has a chance to meet everyone else. She introduces them by name: "Amy, this is Betty. Betty, this is Amy."

"They think it's so corny," Holman said. "It's an intentional part of our program that you meet other women. They may not be at the same skill level but they may be able to connect talking about health and wellness."

Your Turn has hosted “Funzie Events,” social activities like roller skating and fashion shows for participants. The events are in response to requests for activities that weren’t about sitting down to a meal. When it is time to dig in, Your Turn also offers “Small Steps to Healthy Eating,” a healthy living instructional course, where attendees learn about nutrition and mental health. One recent class demonstrated juicers, and when it’s a good idea to get a juice drink.

Last summer, Your Turn worked with second- and third-graders in Constantine, planting a 45-foot-long garden and giving students seeds to grow in their classrooms. At the end of the summer, the crops were picked and given away to Constantine-area residents.

“It was a true community garden,” Holman said. Your Turn is expecting to set up another garden in 2016.

There are about 1,000 “supporting women” attending Your Turn events, Holman said. The organization is not an official 501(c)3 non-profit, but Holman said they are looking for people who can help with the legal part of the process. Each Your Turn activity has a small charge, with all of the money going back to women in the community.

“We buy running shoes and pay for race entry fees for women who can’t afford it,” Holman said.

That emphasis on one-on-one relationships is key to Your Turn, she said. From the start, the goal has been to help people get in shape physically and mentally, and to keep growing by encouraging others to do the same. There’s no shortage of volunteers who help out with race training and nutrition classes; the courses themselves are deliberately limited to just a few people per session.

“We want to make sure we are meeting the needs of the women,” Holman said.

“We want them to find the women they need to find.”

www.yourturnwomen.org

Facebook: [YourTurnWomenKalamazoo](#)

By Andrew Domino

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