



## Retired New Ulm Teacher Commits to Fitness; Succeeds with Support

“Just remember ... if you rest, you’ll rust.” Ever since New Ulm resident Jim Schwarz was preparing for retirement at an early age and heard those words from his New Ulm Medical Center physician, Dr. Scott Rysdahl, he’s been on a personal mission to ensure that never happens to him.

“Those words really stuck in my mind; they kind of scared me a little bit,” said Schwarz, who retired in 2016 after a 33-year career teaching Industrial Technology at New Ulm High School. “I was afraid I was going to be so out of shape and unhealthy that I wouldn’t be able to do all the things I wanted to do in retirement.”

Schwarz had been active for most of his life; he played three sports in high school, played college baseball, coached baseball and football throughout his years as a teacher, and is an avid hunter, fisherman and outdoors enthusiast. But over the years, like many people, he got “sidetracked by everyday life” and started putting on weight during the last six or seven years of his teaching career.

“You get busy with your family and pretty soon you forget about your own fitness and your health,” he said.

Shortly before retiring, Schwarz, now 59, decided he needed to do something and embarked on a journey to get back in shape. After getting a membership at New Ulm Recreation Center and beginning to slowly get more active, he now attends fitness classes twice a week, lifts weights twice week and swims. His results are impressive: he’s lost inches, gained muscle, dropped about 35 pounds and says he’s back to the same weight he was when he graduated from high school. While his blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides measurements were always good, they’ve gotten even better as he’s dropped the weight.

“I know for a fact, that today I can do anything, physically, that I did when I was in my twenties,” Schwarz said.

### New Ulm Rec Center Brimming With Support

On March 17, 2018, Schwarz was excited to learn that he had won a \$250 prize for achieving the largest reduction of total body fat percentage in the New Ulm Recreation Center’s recent 60-day fitness and weight loss challenge called “Going the Distance.” Schwarz said he owes his success in large part to the support and encouragement he’s received from staff and other members at New Ulm Recreation Center.



*Jim Schwarz (center) with New Ulm Recreation Center fitness instructor Anita Longtin (left) and Sandy Bromley, aquatic and fitness coordinator (right).*

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– Jim Schwarz, New Ulm resident

“The people are so friendly and staff are so helpful and motivating,” said Schwarz. “It’s such a great place to go because everybody supports everybody. Being a teacher for 33 years, I’m a people person. When I retired, I realized I missed being around people, so that’s where I go to get my ‘people fix’ and surround myself with like-minded people.”

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Schwarz said he got started by just telling himself he was going to do it. "I really didn't have a plan, but one thing just kind of led to another and pretty soon I started really enjoying going," he said. "I started walking ... then I started on the exercise machines ... then I finally thought, 'Well, if I'm going to do this, I'm going to learn something,' so I started educating myself about exercise and eating."

Schwarz soon started making healthier food choices and his wife Sarah quickly got on board. Now empty nesters, they laugh at how vastly different their grocery cart looks from how it did when they were raising their three children.

One significant change they've made is trying to eliminate processed foods and instead focus on eating natural whole foods. Every day Schwarz takes his own lunch to his part-time retirement job at Advanced Auto Parts, which is usually comprised of some chicken, vegetables and brown rice. He said he eats almost no foods containing added sugars, and that his two bosses, both former students of his, can't believe he's not interested in eating the doughnuts they occasionally bring in to work.

"To say I'm never going to eat another doughnut or piece of pie is not realistic, but moderation is really the key, as it is with anything," explained Schwarz. "There's so much you can eat. We just try to eat as healthy as we can and 80 percent of the time I eat really well."

### Entire Community Enthused About Fitness

After exercising and changing his eating habits, Schwarz said it was "absolutely amazing how fast the weight came off." In fact, over a period of six months, he said he nearly had to buy an entirely new wardrobe twice. He recounts how one day, after going to church wearing a pair of pants that were awkwardly large, he began sorting through his closet and dresser to donate items that no longer fit, only to discover he was left with only socks and underwear.

Along with the tremendous support he's gotten from people at the rec center, his wife and his doctor, Schwarz also credits his success to the impact of Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project

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on the entire New Ulm community. As one example, he explained that when the rec center's aquatic and fitness coordinator, Sandy Bromley, organized the challenge, she expected to attract only about 50 people, but surprisingly, 290 participants signed up.

"I grew up here in New Ulm and I don't think I've ever seen New Ulm this enthused about fitness," said Schwarz. "It's nice to see. I don't often go to Vogel early in the morning as I usually go after work, but when I do it's amazing how many senior citizens are there at 5:30 or 6 in the morning!"

He continued, "Here in New Ulm, it's like every time you pick up a newspaper, every time you're on Facebook or down at the rec center or somewhere, there's always something about The Heart of New Ulm promoting good health. I know when I was at school, the messages were always there, too. It's really been a great program for New Ulm. It keeps reminding you about how you should be eating and things you should be doing."

### Exercise Helping to Defy Father Time

In his continuing quest to ensure he doesn't rest and rust, Schwarz said he always has new fitness goals in his head and takes baby steps to achieve them. His next goal is to participate this summer along with a group of others from New Ulm in the Rugged Maniac race, which is a 5K mud run with 25 obstacles to tackle along the route.

"I never in my life thought I'd ever be able to do that, but it's on my bucket list as I'm turning 60 this summer. I'm trying to defy Father Time a little bit and the exercise is helping," said Schwarz.

He continued, "You know people always think it's such a big deal to get back in shape, but it really isn't if you just pay attention to what you eat and what you do and surround yourself with support. It's amazing how you can make a big change — and fast."