



**BlueCross BlueShield  
of Minnesota**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Minnesotans who overcame weight loss challenges star in new Blue Cross commercials**

*Moving more, eating better is key to better health*

EAGAN, Minn. (Dec.22, 2009) Six Minnesotans who faced obesity head on and won are stars of the new *do*® campaign commercials from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross). These Minnesotans volunteered to tell their struggles about getting healthy, so they can inspire others to tackle their own weight challenges. The Blue Cross campaign is part of an aggressive effort to curb and reverse the state's increasing obesity trend. Currently, more than 60 percent of adults in Minnesota are overweight or obese, which means approximately 2.4 million people in the state are at increased risk for high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis, and colon cancer.

Research shows that people who need to lose weight often are overwhelmed by the prospect. Blue Cross' market research confirms many barriers exist, but that understanding the health risks related to obesity is a top motivator for weight loss. The new *do* campaign gives insight into real stories about getting healthy.

### **Hometown Heroes of Weight Loss**

In her *do* ad, **Kathleen Evers of Millville** shares that her doctor told her she was morbidly obese and wouldn't make it to her 50s without gastric bypass surgery. Kathleen opted not to have the surgery – and lost 198 pounds by joining a gym and eating better. Since her *do* commercial aired, Kathleen, now 52, has been recognized and congratulated multiple times while out shopping, asked in a restaurant about what healthy items she was ordering off the menu, and even had three people ask to join her at gym workouts.

**TJ Melcher of Bemidji** tells about realizing his overeating was affecting his family. In response, he changed his eating habits, began running regularly with his wife and, ultimately lost 100 pounds. He's also been receiving numerous interview requests and text messages asking how he achieved success.

“We've heard hundreds of inspiring stories since the *do* campaign began in 2005,” said Marc Manley, M.D., chief prevention officer at Blue Cross. “We're showcasing these stories so even more Minnesotans are motivated to be healthy.”

Others featured on air include:

- **Scott Vrzal of Montgomery** achieved a 100 pound loss by running on a treadmill and replacing chips and candy bars in his lunch box with fruits and vegetables;

*-more*

- **Carol Reiter of New Hope** wanted to be a positive role model for her children and popular diets never kept the weight off, but by moving throughout the day and making smart food and portion choices, she lost 60 pounds and now wears clothes that are five sizes smaller.
- **JoAnn Rademacher of Buffalo** discovered she had borderline diabetes, but by reading labels and by dusting off her exercise equipment and putting it to use, she lost 50 pounds;
- **Samantha Bushendorf of Columbia Heights** had always been overweight, but after seeing her honeymoon pictures she committed to lose weight, she lost 100 pounds by taking spin classes at a gym, planning healthy meals and eventually joining a mountain biking team.

“Losing weight and adopting a healthier lifestyle can seem overwhelming, but success can be easier if you don’t feel alone,” added Manley. “Our new ad campaign is designed to build momentum and get friends, family and coworkers moving and doing something about obesity and its alarming upward trend.”

Blue Cross is tackling obesity to improve the quality of life of Minnesotans and to address rising health care costs. Treating obesity related illness greatly strains our health care system. A 2008 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota report found that obesity was responsible for 27 percent of the recent increases in Minnesota’s health care costs, and will account for 31 percent of future increases – adding nearly \$1 billion to Minnesota’s total annual health care spending by 2010 and \$3.7 billion by 2020.

The *do* campaign is part of Blue Cross’ Prevention Minnesota initiative, which is funded entirely by Blue Cross’ settlement proceeds from its historic lawsuit against the tobacco companies. Prevention Minnesota works to tackle the leading causes of preventable death and disease in Minnesota. Other programs and services to help members achieve and maintain a healthy weight include: free online health risk assessments and coaching modules, an online wellness center offering such tools as healthy eating plans and BMI calculators, discounts on Weight Watchers and fitness center membership, biking incentives such as “*do*-cycle,” a “Walking Works” walking program for employers, and more.

To view the *do* commercials, webisodes detailing their successes, and many other inspiring stories, visit the [do-groove.com](http://do-groove.com) website. People interested in sharing their personal story can submit it for inclusion on the site and also become a *do* campaign Facebook fan at [www.facebook.com/docampaign](http://www.facebook.com/docampaign). For more information about Blue Cross’ many prevention efforts go to [www.bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota](http://www.bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota).

*Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, with headquarters in the St. Paul suburb of Eagan, was chartered in 1933 as Minnesota’s first health plan and continues to carry out its charter mission today: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. A nonprofit, taxable organization, Blue Cross is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.8 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, headquartered in Chicago. Go to [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Each BlueCross and Blue Shield plan is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.*