

BENTON TWP.

# A step in the right direction

Walking advocate  
to speak at Lake  
Michigan College

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**BENTON TOWNSHIP**  
— You don't have to be  
Forrest Gump and run from  
coast to coast to get in bet-

ter shape, ac-  
cording to  
walking guru  
Robert Sweet-  
gall, though  
he has criss-  
crossed the  
country seven  
times himself.

“Just get  
off the couch  
and get moving,” said  
Sweetgall, a fitness advo-



**SWEETGALL**

cate often called “the real  
Forrest Gump.”

He will bring his moving  
message to Lake Michigan  
College's Blue Lecture Hall  
at noon, 3 and 6 p.m. Mon-  
day.

“If you can get to the first  
mile a day, you're on your  
way to better health,”  
Sweetgall said by phone,  
while watching snow fall  
outside his mountaintop

home in Idaho.

Even 10 minutes a day is  
a step in the right direction,  
he said.

“You gotta start some-  
where. ... Just get your buns  
off the couch!”

Sweetgall knows how im-  
portant it is to go from fat-  
ness to fitness. At his Brook-  
lyn high school he was

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## WALKING

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valedictorian and a math whiz, but was known as “Butterball.”

In college he became aware of his family’s history of heart disease, which had caused several fatal heart attacks.

“The writing was on the wall for me,” Sweetgall said, and he began a jogging program, eventually logging more than 100 miles a week. “I probably took it to the extreme.”

A desire to carry his message of physical fitness across the country led him to quit his job as an atomic engineer with DuPont in 1982 and embark on a journey around the perimeter of America. He reached 37 states and talked to thousands of students.

He started off running and walking, covering 38 miles a day (“a marathon and a half a day, every day”) and ended up limping into schools, hardly an inspiring sight.

He switched to walking only, and discovered that he felt better and his mileage increased. He completed the 10,608-mile loop in July 1983, with students often accompanying him along the way.

Not content with that feat, Sweetgall set out in 1984 to walk across all 50 states (including Alaska and Hawaii, which he reached by plane) in 365 days. He covered 11,208 miles, and became the first person to walk through all the states in a year.

Sweetgall is still convinced that walking is the best form of exercise for everyone, from kids to senior citizens.

“I think every American child should start the school day with a walk,” Sweetgall said. “They should blow a whistle or sound a bell, and the entire school, all students, all teachers, all employees, should go out for a walk and 10 minutes of fresh air.”

Studies have shown that children who take a 20-minute walk have higher brain activity and do better on tests than when they stay seated, he said. Walking improves cognitive functioning for older folks, as well, he said.

But two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, and we still refuse to get moving, with tragic consequences.

According to Sweetgall’s latest book, “One Heart, Two Feet,” written with Barry Franklin of Royal Oak, almost 2,300 Americans die of cardiovascular disease each day – one death every 37 seconds.

He said he hopes his lectures will be a step in the right direction for his listeners.

At his noon program at LMC, Sweetgall will discuss “Surviving Stress in a Wild World,” offering information on how stress affects the body and tips on beating stress.

From 3-4 p.m., Sweetgall will speak on “The Motivation to Move,” with recommendations for reducing stress and losing weight.

From 6-8 p.m., he will combine his talk on “The Motivation to Move” with a demonstration of Nordic walking, using ski poles to burn more calories while relieving the strain on feet, hips and knees.

All sessions are free and open to the public. The evening session is sponsored by Lake Michigan College and the YMCA of St. Joseph-Benton Harbor.

Sweetgall’s appearance was arranged with the assistance of Don Alsbro, a health and physical education teacher at LMC from 1972-92 who worked with Sweetgall on his “Dump Your Plump” exercise and weight loss challenge.

Alsbro “is a rare gem,” Sweetgall said. “He has his heart in these programs and feels strongly about the importance of health and fitness.”

Sweetgall threw out a challenge to all the professors of Lake Michigan College to bring their classes to the noon and 3 p.m. sessions, so the students can learn about the science and cutting-edge technology of health and fitness.

Information on Sweetgall’s programs is available at [www.creativewalking.com](http://www.creativewalking.com).

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