

Vertical Challenge

Local "Biggest Loser" competitors tackle McAndrews Hill — and each other — on the road to health

By [Sarah Lemon](#)

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Runners, walkers and cyclists can be seen most days mounting the upper portion of McAndrews Road.

The meandering route, with its steady incline from Thrasher Lane, terminating in a steep slope where the street meets Hillcrest Road, rapidly elevates the heart rate no matter one's fitness pursuit. For the next month, a troupe of women looking to be the next "biggest losers" are making this their workout mainstay, tackling it at all hours of the day to jump-start weight loss and get on the road to health.

"Anytime anybody wants to walk the hill, I'm up there," says Michelle Gordon, trainer at Women's Fitness Company in Medford and team leader for the gym's "Biggest Loser" contest.

Five members of the gym's blue team and brown team show up for the evening's workout, as they have since the 10-week promotional contest kicked off in late September. Gordon and fellow trainer and team leader Cindy Wilson have advocated exercising outside but, after a prolonged Indian summer, the weather has taken a turn.

A strong wind sweeps down the hill, sending leaves skittering over the sidewalk and street. The women face directly into the gale for more than a mile and a half of walking, running or pushing a baby stroller.

"It's horrible," says Sherry Trobec, 68, of Jacksonville, after walking a few hundred feet.

"It takes your breath away," Wilson says. "The last few weeks we've been here, the weather's been fabulous."

Further down the hill, Jennifer Lundquist, 33, of Central Point, hurries to catch up.

"All I saw was brown, brown, and I thought where's my girls?" she says, referring to the other's team's T-shirts.

"Here they come," Trobec says, spotting members of the other team.

"And there's two more behind 'em," Lundquist says.

Good-natured competition between the two teams, which follows the format of NBC's primetime television show "The Biggest Loser," is one selling point of the local program, Gordon says.

"The team spirit of it ... they've all become friends; they cheer for each other," she says.

After their fifth week, the 13 participants had lost a combined total of 95 pounds, trainers say. All were given a "bodybugg," an electronic device the size of a wristwatch that tracks calories burned. Online, bodybugg users can log all the food they've consumed, and a computer program calculates their calorie deficit, Gordon says.

"I've learned so much more than weight loss," says Manette Aplin, 33, of Central Point. "It's not even about the weight loss anymore.

"I eat such clean food; I don't even eat much that's processed right now."

How many calories participants burn depends on several factors, Wilson explains, including whether they walk or run the 3.4-mile round-trip section of McAndrews and how much muscle they have. After jogging part way with Wilson, 27-year-old Teresa Casey, of White City, burned about 300 calories, according to her bodybugg. First to the top, the duo takes a well-deserved break.

"That's our reward for getting here first," Casey says, adding that walkers who arrive last have to keep moving.

"Biggest Loser" contestants didn't have to join Women's Fitness Company to compete in the promotion. For a fee of \$350, nonmembers have full use of the gym for the 10 weeks and the assistance of its personal trainers, which yields "10 times more results," says Jan Jackson, 56, of Central Point. Like the show, Gordon and Wilson are planning "team challenges," as well.

For most, just getting to the top of McAndrews is challenge enough. As saplings newly planted in park rows struggle to stand upright, Aplin and 30-year-old Christy Dungan, of Medford, struggle to crest the hill's last rise pushing a baby carriage. Lundquist arrives next with Trobec bringing up the rear.

"I'm not going to be the only one who doesn't make it to the top," says Trobec, as Wilson trots behind her for encouragement.

At the top, the contest's oldest participant symbolically touches the metal utility pole where the sidewalk ends — to the applause of fellow "losers."

"The trip down is easy."

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