



## One Step At A Time

Susan Gallagher's competitive streak started early. As one of 14 children growing up on a farm, she was instilled with the importance of eating right and staying fit at an early age. But it wasn't until she embarked on a career as an occupational therapist that she began to wonder how her zest for healthy living could help others gain the confidence and motivation to improve their own physical condition.

The answer began to emerge in 1997 when Gallagher, along with two partners, opened Salem's Gallagher Fitness Resources. A year later, she hit upon an idea to help local women prepare for a regional road race, and the Women's Walking and Running Clinic was born. The clinic provides training guidelines, support, encouragement and accountability to help women reach their goals of completing an event.

"At the time I thought, 'I'm only going to do this once,'" Gallagher says. "But before the clinic was up, women were asking when the next clinic was. Fast-forward to now with 12 years, 28 clinics and having helped thousands of women."

Clinic participants meet as a group once a week for 12 weeks. Each session begins with a 30-minute presentation on topics that range from monitoring your heart rate and the importance of heart health to choosing the right walking or running shoe, injury prevention and breathing and stretching. Afterward, the women walk or run, dividing into pace groups. They leave with their own "homework," or training schedule, to complete over the course of the week.

"We emphasize that what you are doing now is saving your life down the road." Gallagher says.

Recognizing that what comes easy to her can be a struggle for others, Gallagher says that she gets immense gratification from giving so many women the tools and confidence to improve their health, one step at a time.

"That's what charges me up," she says. "When they come and tell me how happy they are. That inspires me."

- Rachel Bucci

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