

LOSING WEIGHT
TOPS
takes on
'sensible'
approach

Worcester chapter
meets on Thursdays

By Amanda Roberge
Correspondent

WORCESTER — Flying safely under the radar of the constant bombardment from the multi-billion dollar weight-loss industry, one nonprofit organization has existed quietly and humbly for nearly 70 years.

With no prepackaged meals or rigorous workout DVDs to sell, and asking only \$32 per year from its members, the club maintains an intentional distance from every waist trainer, pill and shake.

Founded in 1948, TOPS, known more formally as Take Off Pounds Sensibly, has been an often-overlooked option in the almighty American plight to maintain a healthy body weight.

The conversation at TOPS is centered around building better habits and capitalizing on the available resources, research and information that will help people to hold themselves accountable as they make lifestyle changes designed to promote wellness and health.

The weekly support meetings, according to Worcester chapter leader Laurie Halpin, are the continuing opportunity for accountability,

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those meetings have also helped people to build relationships with others in their community who share the same goals and struggles.

"Like most of us, I have been overweight all my life," she said, adding that while her weight goes up and down, it was the support she found through TOPS that helped her to take off over 100 pounds about 10 years ago. "It's been a never ending battle, which is something that people here understand."

The Worcester TOPS chapter meets on Thursday evening, and meetings consist of a weigh-in and social time, in addition to a more formal program featuring various speakers, lectures, workshops and classes that range in topic but are always focused on some aspect of mental, emotional or physical health.

She added that while the group's membership is currently only 10-12 people depending on the time of year, many of them rely on that weekly weigh-in, and personal check-in, to get them through another week.

Two members from the Worcester

chapter, Judy Harris and Christine Frisard, were recently honored at a two-day TOPS Recognition Days event in Cape Cod designed to "celebrate the big and little successes that our members have," Ms. Halpin said.

Ms. Harris said that it is the myriad ways that TOPS stays connected with its members that has made all the difference, ultimately paving the way for a 106-pound loss in the 1990s. While her membership has ebbed and flowed over the years, it is the place she always returns to when she knows she needs a little extra support in making good choices and taking care of herself.

"TOPS really motivates me, especially when you see all of the success stories and see what happens when people stick with it," she said. "The support I get is something that really means a lot to me."

Ms. Frisard, who attended the meetings with her husband Ron, finds that while some weight loss programs make their reputation on telling people exactly what to eat and when to eat it, the people who find their way to TOPS have experienced a lifetime of being overweight and have "been there and done that" with every plan out there.

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To learn more about TOPS, visit tops.org. The first meeting is free to attend, and \$5 in dues money is collected at subsequent meetings. Anyone interested in learning more about the Worcester chapter is invited to stop by Trinity Lutheran Church, located at 73 Lancaster St., on Thursdays at 6:30 p.m.