



Alton Memorial's Health Hall of Famer Wins Weight Loss Battle

September 11 2012 2:06 PM

ALTON, IL – Julie Willaredt realizes now the health risks she faced when her two children were born. By making some wise choices the last couple of years, the Alton Memorial Hospital nurse knows that her children will be seeing more of her – because they're seeing less of her.

Willaredt, a nurse on the AMH Medical Care Unit, was the hospital's nominee for this year's BJC Health Hall of Fame. She has lost 70 pounds in two years since her daughter was born and enjoyed a general improvement in her health in what has been a battle with a weight problem since her adolescent years.

"The birth of my second child was the turning point in my journey," Willaredt said. "I'm the youngest of six children, and to those who see me now it may be a bit of a surprise but I've always been the 'big girl.' I often brag that I'm the tallest female in my family, standing at 5 feet, 2 inches, but I've also been the largest in size."

Julie Willaredt, a nurse on Alton Memorial Hospital's Medical Care Unit, has lost 70 pounds in the last two years and improved her health significantly. She is the AMH representative in the 2012 BJC Health Hall of Fame.

Julie's mother, on the other hand, "on a bad day weighs in at 110." Feeling the pressure of literally having to measure up, Julie rebelled. Being healthy was the furthest thing

from her mind. Willaredt became engaged not long after starting at AMH seven years ago.

“Most people who knew me when I started at Alton Memorial can remember my crash dieting to fit into my wedding dress,” she said. “I became known as the girl with her pepper and salad lunches. Needless to say, the crash dieting was not a solution. I ended up having to have my wedding dress let out in order to make it fit.”

Two years later, Julie became pregnant with her first child. She weighed more than 190 pounds at the time and the extra weight caused gestational diabetes, which led to many complications when her son was born.

“Fortunately, my son was born very healthy, but following his birth I was placed on three blood pressure medications,” Willaredt said.

Julie maintained her weight at about 160 pounds and felt comfortable. Two years later she became pregnant with her daughter. She saw a prenatal specialist who monitored her for pregnancy-induced hypertension. Her blood pressure began to rise and an amniocentesis was performed to determine her daughter’s lung development in order to reduce risks.

“After undergoing two amniocenteses, it was determined my daughter could safely be born at 37 weeks,” Willaredt said. “Again, I am fortunate for the healthy birth of our baby. After that, I stopped weighing myself. The last number on the scale that I saw was 200 pounds. I was devastated and knew something had to be done. I didn’t have the energy that I needed to keep up with two children.”

Julie decided to go to a Weight Watchers meeting and also began talking to a family friend online. She even learned to cook.

“My husband was doing the majority of the cooking and I needed to take responsibility for the things I put in my mouth,” Willaredt said. “Surprisingly, my husband was most supportive of this change.

“These decisions shaped the new me. Just simply by choosing healthier options of bread, milk, and drink selections I was able to lose 30 pounds. With Weight Watchers, family support and the help of an online coach I lost a total of 70 pounds. I met my goal weight and I’m happy to say that my driver’s license says I weigh more than I actually do. My cholesterol level went from 218 to 146. My blood pressure is now 110/70 and all medication has been discontinued by my doctor.

“I have maintained my weight for 10 months now. My journey is far from over but I have successfully acquired many tools needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Perhaps in the future I can help to inspire others to reach their full potential. One thing is certain -- I will never return to the poor health choices of my past.”

BJC Health Hall of Fame members were chosen from among 115 nominees. In its 10th year, the Health Hall of Fame honors employees who have achieved significant health improvements or inspired co-workers through their actions involving health or fitness. Employees are nominated by their peers and selected by a committee at their respective organizations.

Honorees will be recognized on the field before the Sept. 29 Cardinals game vs. the Washington Nationals.