



Amy Kasarda is AMH's BJC Health Hall of Famer

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ALTON – It was about a year ago that Amy Kasarda decided that she wanted a different look when she walked her daughter out on the court for Senior Night activities for the Gillespie High School volleyball team.

That decision has helped Amy lose 105 pounds since then, leading her to become Alton Memorial Hospital's nominee for the 2018 BJC Health Hall of Fame. Amy, a nurse in the AMH Women's Health and Childbirth Center, will be honored on the field before the Cardinals game with the San Francisco Giants on Sept. 23, along with the other BJC Health Hall of Fame nominees.

"I started in early August 2017 when four co-workers and I took part in Healthy Wage through BJC," Amy said. "I decided to join because I knew I needed to lose weight and wanted to look better to walk Mackenzie, my oldest daughter, onto the court and field for her senior night events. I also knew I needed to lose the weight to be an example for my daughters, Mackenzie and Kylie (14 years old). I needed to show them that anything is possible if you put your mind to it."

Amy's main strategy has been Weight Watchers online. She has joined through the discounted price offered to BJC employees.

"I eat several fruits and veggies daily," she said. "I also eat more meats lower in fat. I will allow myself to have some ribeye or prime rib on occasion, but I just limit my portion of it. I avoid fried foods, rarely eat pasta and really limit sugary treats. I have also cut back on the amount of cheese I eat and eliminated extras added to my food. And I drink water 99 percent of the time. I will occasionally have a diet soda but it is rare. I feel better when I drink my water."

In the process, Amy has not only helped herself and her family but also inspired her co-workers.

"Amy continued with her healthy lifestyle changes long after the HealthyWage challenge ended last year," said Dana Hazelwood, a co-worker who nominated Amy for the honor. "She continues to be an inspiration and motivator to others in our department. Amy and four more co-workers joined the BJC HealthyWage challenge again this year. She exemplifies how hard work, perseverance and dedication can lead to success."

As most people know, losing weight is far from easy -- and Amy is no exception.

"In July, our family (husband George and her two daughters) went on a long vacation without my scale, I had too many 'cheat days' and I gained a few pounds back," Amy said. "When I got home and back on my scale I was frustrated with myself and got right back to my healthier lifestyle. I lost all that I gained and a few more."

Amy's advice to anyone wanting to lose weight is to be patient. She recommends tracking your food and planning your meals ahead of time. And she hasn't even incorporated exercise into her daily routine yet, but has set that as a goal for this year.

And her co-workers continue to be amazed.

"She is always putting the needs of others before her own," Hazelwood wrote in the nomination. "She is one of those mothers who rarely, if ever, misses any sporting event, dance or any other school event in which her daughters take part, many times doing that on limited sleep after working her 12-hour plus night shifts. She also puts her patients' needs above her own, missing more than just a few dinner breaks and often grabbing anything quick while on the run. One can see where the hustle and bustle of day-to-day living can lead to unhealthy habits."