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New year, new you?

Studies show success rate for resolutions is low, but local dietitian and life coach see the positives

By BENJAMIN LEGER

ben.leger@timesofacadiana.com

When attempting a fresh start, look no further than the first day of a new calendar year.

For many, it's the beginning of a long road to a brand new you.

But unfortunately for some, the tradition of New Year's resolutions is often more about seeing how long they will last. While Lafayette's Police Chief Jim Craft says in these pages that he holds the world record for abandoning New Year's resolutions, we figure many others would make the same claim.

A December survey from the Opinion Research Corporation claims about half of us, at least in the United States, will fail at accomplishing New Year's resolutions.

Most respondents said their resolutions for 2007 dealt with health, finance or finding a better work/life balance. Out of those who wanted to increase exercise, 51 percent failed. For those who wanted to eat healthier, 58 percent failed. About 58 percent of those who wanted to get out of debt failed as well.

The highest failure rate was for those who wanted to increase their spiritual life -- 60 percent.

But despite all those stumbles, 75 percent are ready to try again for 2008.

The survey also shed some light on how age, sex, relationships and location play into success and failure of resolutions.

Fresh out of college and already feeling overworked? Those in the 18-24 years old range failed completely at resolving to work less and have more leisure time.

Single and living alone? You were less likely to improve your exercise schedule last year.

Unfortunately for Southerners, we were more likely to fail at any health-related resolution than the rest of the country. The survey's suggestion? Move out West -- the great outdoors will give you have a better chance. Westerners also fared better at getting organized, while Northeast residents did the poorest job.

So what are our excuses? Out of those surveyed, 41 percent said their goals were too lofty.

Avis S. Domingue, a registered licensed dietitian and president of the Lafayette district for the

Louisiana Dietetic Association, agrees that big resolutions are an even bigger problem.

"Sometimes people might make a mistake by setting unrealistic goals," she says. "You want to set as specific goals as possible if you really want to achieve them."

Smaller steps are the key to success, Domingue says. If you have a lot of weight to lose, attempting to work it off in the first three months of the year is a quick path to failure.

As a dietitian, Domingue helps people develop individualized plans that cater to their body type and genetic factors such as high blood pressure or diabetes. Most of her clients are referred by their doctors, and Domingue says she sees the most referrals around New Year's.

"Nutrition is something you do everyday, not something you do once in a while," she says. "Small things can make a huge difference over the end of the week, month or year to turn things around."

Melinda Sorensson, a certified life coach based in Lafayette, says there is a much more important task in achieving a resolution: How you word it.

"People who set goals, there's a mechanism in our brains that tells us immediately whether we'll accomplish the goal or not," she says. "The phrasing of a goal is very important. If you say you want to lose 20 pounds in the next year and have never lost that kind of weight before (and aren't sure you can do it) -- automatically, the brain senses that affirmation."

Instead, Sorensson tells her clients to phrase a resolution around what they'd like to do once they've achieved the goal, such as: "I'm going to feel healthier and better when I've lost 20 pounds this year."

"They need to acknowledge where they are and be comfortable with that first," she says. "They need to acknowledge they are setting goals because they want to be in a better place. Any goal is an impetus for change. If in ourselves we already have a need to change, then that's a positive expansion."

So rest assured, even if you aren't likely to succeed this year, at least you are moving in the right direction.
