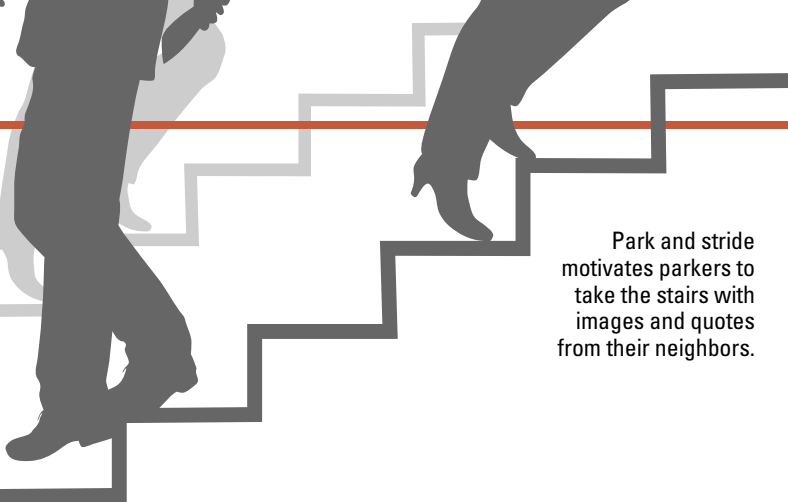




# STRIDING FOR COMMUNITY SUCCESS



Park and stride motivates parkers to take the stairs with images and quotes from their neighbors.



**By Robin Davenport**

Parking professionals team up with wellness experts in Greensboro, N.C., to get the whole community moving.

**T**his is the month gym memberships, purchased with all good intentions 30 days ago, lose their luster. Attendance falls—that extra half-hour of sleep is much more appealing than a few miles on the treadmill, after all—and many of us lose our will to keep exercising.

Here in Greensboro, N.C., we've found what we hope will be a fun way to keep our residents moving and healthier. No gym membership required, either! In fact, it's as easy as parking a car.

Park and Stride is a public service campaign in the City of Greensboro that promotes increased daily physical activity in the lives of our employees and residents. This program encourages stairwell use in the four downtown city-owned parking decks; stair climbing is a low-cost and convenient way to add exercise into one's daily routine, and climbing them in a natural way throughout the week is much easier than making time for a gym machine.

### The Study

The initial partnership that made the program possible was between the City of Greensboro and the University of North Carolina-Greensboro (UNCG). UNCG staff was interested in conducting a study of the number of patrons who used the stairs in the parking decks and the local city hall building. After an initial







assessment, UNCG staff installed positively-themed prompt signs at the elevators in the four city decks and city hall to get patrons thinking about using the stairs and their legs instead of elevators and buttons to go from floor to floor.

Several weeks after the signs were installed, staff conducted a second study of stairwell use to determine if the positive signage prompted any changed behavior. The study results reflected there was a slight increase in overall stairwell use. UNCG later provided grant money for improvements and enhancements for the stairwells in the parking decks in a continuing effort to encourage and promote wellness in the city.

As part of this project, the city's parking operations office worked in conjunction with wellness city staff to partner with UNCG to develop a story mural in the downtown Church Street Parking Deck. An art student at UNCG developed a story line with graphics that offer a visual timeline of a variety of Greensboro historical events; some of its details are also offered in Spanish. The art student also involved local children with the African American Atelier—a local nonprofit arts organization that promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity—to assist with painting the characters in the stairwell.

Supplies for the project cost about \$2,000, which was covered by the initial grant, and the art student managed the project as part of a class project.

### Making it Competitive

Last year, the parking operations office learned there was a remaining balance in the initial grant fund that had to be used by its expiration at the end of the year. Staff there notified the city's new wellness professional and began a conversation about the best way to use that

money. Together, they decided to hold a contest for city employees to design a program to promote the use of city garage stairwells. Contestants had to develop a health and wellness-based theme to encourage citizens to use the stairs, propose installation details (mounting something directly on the walls, framing posters for the walls, or other options), and provide an estimated cost to implement their proposed program.

As a result of the contest, the program that became Park and Stride was born. The city's decision to add a full-time wellness professional to staff increased resources and greatly helped focus and develop the project. In May 2013, the city conducted an RFP and reached out to local businesses to get the project off paper and into its garages.

### Resident Involvement

To achieve the Park and Stride vision, 44 outstanding city employees who make wellness a part of their everyday lives were photographed. Each photograph was reproduced to be a life-size employee portrait, which was then printed on metal and routed to shape. These images were installed on the walls of the stairwells and actually look like people walking the stairs. The following information was included: employee's first name; work title; statement that begins, "I walk because...;" a related healthy tip; logo; and QR code that takes visitors to a city website with wellness tips, healthy recipes, and information on local services to help residents get and stay fit.



Because the main audience is anyone who is about to ride the elevator, it was also important to include a point-of-decision prompt. Elevator wraps were installed with the following text: “I walk because I choose to add a little extra activity into my daily routine. And if the stairs aren’t an option, what can you do today to improve all your tomorrows?”

The goals of the elevator wraps are:

- To encourage anyone who is able to take the stairs.
- To address the fact that not everyone can choose to take the stairs.
- To support people in making healthy choices, recognizing that sometimes the healthy choice is to not take the stairs.

### Success

Installation of the images began Sept. 3 and was completed in phases in the city’s four parking decks. The project officially opened at the Greensboro Fire Department’s 2013 Step Up Greensboro 9/11 Memorial Climb in the Bellemeade Street Parking Deck. A Greensboro firefighter who was personally affected by the events of 9/11 was chosen to pose for one of the featured images.

An important part of the project was to celebrate the installation and get the word out around town through a Park and Stride Photo Contest on Instagram. The contest ran from Sept. 16 through Oct. 12. This was a virtual contest in which residents photographed



Wall-mounted images and elevator wraps encourage users to get more exercise.

It was important to set goals for the City of Greensboro’s Park and Stride project. The goals helped focus what we hoped to accomplish and structure the program for the greatest benefits. Program objectives are:

- Increase daily physical activity for our employees and visitors (both stair climbers and elevator users).
- Post point-of-decision prompts.
- Post motivational signage.
- Increase the attractiveness of the stairs to those who might choose the elevator.
- Encourage a community dialogue about wellness via social media.

themselves adding steps or any other kind of activity to their day. They were asked to upload those images to the Instagram photo sharing site and indicate why they walk by tagging each photo #IWalkGSO @IWalkGSO. From this contest, two winners were selected; both received their own life-size images that will be installed in the one of the city parking decks. The contest was open to everyone because a healthy City of Greensboro benefits us all.

This was a great collaborative project between several city departments and was quite a success with the images that were produced and installed. The city is focused on providing healthy lifestyle choices for its employees, citizens, and visitors to downtown. This definitely sheds new light on endless possibilities for downtown parking decks as a partnering opportunity for Wellness. Come visit the City of Greensboro, and Park and Stride with us!



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