

***Mayors Prevent Hypertension through Move with the Mayor - Michelle Snyder Interviews Mayor Steven Sherlin***

*John Clymer:* Next, Michelle Snyder, Community Engagement Coordinator at the National Forum, is going to interview Mayor Steven Sherlin of Athens, Tennessee. Mayor Sherlin's commitment to improving community health and wellbeing has led Athens to become a model city in the fight against hypertension. Through initiatives such as Move with the Mayor, Mayor Sherlin has demonstrated the positive impact of local leadership on cardiovascular health. Over to you, Michelle.

*Michelle Snyder:* Thank you, John. We are joined today by Mayor Steven Sherlin from the City of Athens, Tennessee. Thank you so much, Mayor Sherlin, for joining us.

*Mayor Sherlin:* I'm certainly happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

*Michelle Snyder:* Mayor Sherlin, can you tell us a bit about why you have prioritized heart health for Athens' residents?

*Mayor Sherlin:* Well, it's a priority for me because I don't know if you remember or not, I had a stroke myself about six years ago, and it was a time that was very difficult for me, and in order to make sure that I'm in the best health and shape that I can be, and also be here for my family, and for my community, I wanted to be sure that I got involved in things that would help me to recover from this stroke. It was a long road to recovery, and without all the support that I had, I wouldn't be in this position that I'm in today. I know how important walking just for 20 minutes a day is for your health, and I wasn't able to do that at first, but I encourage everyone to make just those small starts to lessen their chances of heart issues like I had, because it is a difficult thing to overcome.

*Michelle Snyder:* Mayor Sherlin, thank you so much for sharing those details. I've had the privilege of working with the City of Athens, Tennessee for several seasons of Move with the Mayor now. How do your activities and partnerships including Move with the Mayor empower residents to take control of their heart health, including controlling their blood pressure?

*Mayor Sherlin:* Well, I'll have to say that I was a little unsure how far my abilities would allow me to participate when it came to physical activities when Brianna asked me to get involved in the Move with the Mayor program, because I wasn't sure exactly what I would be able to do as far as exercise, and promoting the Move with the Mayor program. Like I said, I had a stroke years ago, and it was a slow, slow process in getting back to the shape that I was in before that happened. This program has inspired me to push myself and as

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I do that, I think about my family and my community and it helps me knowing what I went through, that they want to support me, and it encourages them seeing me involved in those kinds of things as well. One of our activities that we were involved in was a half mile walking – in the beginning, was a half mile walking loop of our health triangle at our Eureka Trail. This health triangle was sponsored by our local health council and hospital, and it features signs about healthy living and meal portions, and the right kind of exercise, and the things that you should do daily in order to improve your health. So, while we were walking along this short trail, we stopped to read the signs that were placed all along this trail, which are remarkable. As we moved on, the conversation steered towards what we were reading on each of those signs. This particular walk inspired our local senior center, by the way, to start a walking club. It's something they did on their own as a result of being involved with Walk with the Mayor. They began to meet weekly and that, to me, made our efforts in this Walk with the Mayor program a huge success indeed.

*Michelle Snyder:* The countywide community walking program serves as a part of Move with the Mayor where over 6,600 miles were walked from 220 participants. That is incredible. Mayor Sherlin, what are some of the other heart healthy resources provided to the residents in Athens?

*Mayor Sherlin:* Well, of course, as you mentioned, we have all our parks here in the city. It's not just one, but we have multiple parks. They have trails on them from short trails to long trails, and we're actually adding onto our park system. Hopefully that's going to take place within the next year. We're hoping to add about 15 more acres to our regional park and add more walking in the nature area of that park. Healthy cooking and living activities with our extension office here, and McMinn County is something else that we have a high priority with and for. In our schools, we have – we work with the schools to make sure that the children are getting the right nutrition, and the nutritionists there, they're really good with how they work with these children in our schools. We also hold health fairs here in the city for our citizens. There's a lot of things that we do working with the county and if we're not coming up with it, they're coming up with something to come with us, to work with us. Actually, Move with the Mayor program, even as far as that goes, I even get John Gentry, our local county mayor to come and participate in that with us as much as I can. It's hard to corral him though. *[laughter]*

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*Michelle Snyder:* Mayor Sherlin, thank you so much for sharing all the fun activities that you've been able to host with Move with the Mayor. How do you address reducing disparities and promoting health equity across your heart health and wellbeing related programming?

*Mayor Sherlin:* Well, the City of Athens has actually been doing some incredible efforts within our city to make our city more pedestrian and biker friendly. We've added accessible sidewalks in our residential areas that didn't have great access before that, that connect to our – they connect now to our parks and our main transportation ways. They connect our neighborhoods together. We had a recreation master plan done some time ago within our entire county, and our residents stated that they actually wanted more trails and that was one of the first additions that we planned for, adding a walking trail along the creek in a part that's currently being renovated. We also have more plans to extend our already exceptional Eureka Trail, and also following the phenomenal growth and excitement of pickleball, which seems to be a trend throughout the United States, we're improving our current tennis courts to accommodate more pickleball than tennis users there. We're actually renovating. We're tearing those up and rebuilding them – brand new facilities there. We aim to provide our residents with the best quality free recreational opportunities to keep our community healthy and happy.

*Michelle Snyder:* Fantastic work being done in Athens. Mayor Sherlin, you touched on the collaboration and partnership with the county health department earlier. Can you tell us a bit about the work you do with McMinn County Health Department and how that collaboration has impacted the residents in the City of Athens?

*Mayor Sherlin:* It's impacted the residents of Athens and the county by our sharing resources and encouraging people to use our free facilities that are available not only to our citizens in Athens but also in the county as well. We live in an area that actually is in a low-income area, in a state and we have people who don't have opportunities to go to places like Gatlinburg or Pidgeon Forge or maybe even travel to the mountains to do hiking. Our facilities here are just phenomenal for people to enjoy the beauty of our parks and our walking trails and we make that available free through our association with the county health department.

*Michelle Snyder:* Mayor Sherlin, what is one piece of advice you would give our audience to help them get their mayors to promote heart health in their community?

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*Mayor Sherlin:* I could give many, but I'll give you one. One of the reasons that I'm in the position that I am is because I listen. I do. I listen to people. I want to know what my community wants – not only what they want, but what they need. I want them to feel supported by those that they elect office. So, I would encourage anyone to speak up to their city or county officials and stress the importance of open communication and to give suggestions to those individuals for what you want to see in your community, because that's what goes on here. We listen to those in our community as they come forward individually or anonymously. We bring that up in our council meetings and we make certain that we address things that are important to our community.

*Michelle Snyder:* Mayor Sherlin, thank you for joining us today and sharing a little bit about what you're doing in Athens, Tennessee.

*Mayor Sherlin:* Thank you, and thank you for making this program possible, because it really has helped us to improve the health of our citizens here in Athens. It got me involved in ways that I'm very grateful for. Because if you would have seen me two and a half years ago, you wouldn't think I'd be sitting here today talking, but I am. I am very grateful. I look forward to what's coming ahead with Move with the Mayor.

*John Clymer:* Thank you, Michelle, and Mayor Sherlin. Your conversation highlighted the profound influence local leadership has on community wellbeing. The National Forum is pleased that Move with the Mayor is helping you improve health in Athens and McMinn County. After another round of your haiku creativity, we'll discuss improving equitable access to self-measured blood pressure control.