

\$10,000 WINNER

Deb Knopsnider

Walmart Supercenter #1765 | Somerset, PA

SPRING 2024
THRIVE CHALLENGE
GRAND CHAMPION

My husband, Carl, passed away from liver cancer in 2013. I knew he was at peace and wasn't suffering anymore, but it was a huge loss. We did everything together and I still miss him. Financially, it's been tough too without as much money coming in. I have four children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, who I help to support. I also help to take care of my 94-year-old mother.

Life wasn't joyful, and I wasn't taking time to take care of myself.

When I felt sleepy, I'd have a bag of chips — I called them my "stay awake chips." But they didn't make me feel good. I weighed 177 pounds and I was in constant pain. My joints hurt, I was stiff, and I had restless leg syndrome. When I sat down, it was hard to get back up. A co-worker told me how much the Thrive Challenge had helped her, so I got started.

I've had fun trying food swaps to improve my eating habits.

For breakfast, I'll have oatmeal with blueberries instead of sugary cereal. For snacks, I'm eating apples, and nuts and pumpkin seeds instead of chips. I live with my daughter, Becky, and my son, Caleb, and we're all eating healthier. We take turns cooking. I make vegetable soup or tuna patties with broccoli or kale salad. My son makes chicken and Brussels sprouts in the air fryer.

I began stretching every morning, which helped ease my pain.

With fewer aches, I was able to go for walks along a trail by the library with Becky. There's an open field as well as woods where there are pretty flowers and a koi pond. It's so peaceful. At first I'd have to turn around after a few minutes because I'd get tired, but as I walked a little more each day, I got stronger, and now I walk the whole track. Over the months, my joints became less stiff, and I'm actually speed walking now. At 72, I run circles around the young people I work with! I feel so happy that I can climb ladders at work again and reach for things on a high shelf. I've lost 17 pounds and I'm in less pain.

At home, Becky and I put on music and dance when we need a boost.

We love "Happy Dance" by MercyMe. We'll watch the video and laugh so hard because I can't keep in step and do the right moves. But dancing brings me so much joy. I dance whenever a good song comes on the radio at work, which gives everyone a good laugh!

My favorite Microstep is setting aside time for my passion: music.

The best thing that's happened since starting the Challenge is being inspired to pick up my guitar again after many years. Growing up, my family loved music, and I learned how to play the guitar. I hadn't made time for music for a long time because I was busy looking after my family. I started playing again and composing music. I'm very spiritual and I write Christian songs. It feels wonderful to be creative again. I have a whole songbook I'm going to try and get published now that I feel more confident. The first song is called "God's Rainbow."

Every Sunday I volunteer at church and share my love for music.

I greet people and welcome them as they come in. Sometimes I play the tambourine, sing my songs, and get people dancing. A gentleman the other day said I was his sunshine and that made my day.

A couple of months ago, I found out I'd won the Thrive Challenge.

Oh my golly, I teared up. I was so excited. Becky and I are going to celebrate by taking a Disney cruise to the Bahamas. I've kept going with Thrive because it helps so much — I'm less stressed and more calm. I don't let things like bills bother me as much. I just pay them when I can. I've found that worrying doesn't help. I feel happier, and I know Carl would be happy for me too.

I have more energy for my family, and I'm teaching them the joy of music.

I play soccer and badminton with my grandson, Jacob. And when I'm taking care of 1-year-old Jane, I can get down on my hands and knees with her. We'll go outside in our yard to play with our three dogs. She especially loves our new puppy, Bella. All my grandchildren love when I sing to them. I'll sing hymns and favorites like "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Sometimes I'll play my guitar and Becky will play the piano. We'll sing "Hang On Sloopy," by The McCoys, which my late father loved. When I go to see mom, I'll sing to her and my brother, Gary, who lives with her.

When I'm with my mom, I have more patience to help her out.

I'll help her get dressed and give her a haircut sometimes. We play card games like Go Fish, and we do crafts, like sewing decorative felt hearts. She thanks me all the time, and I say, "Mom, you took care of me for all those years. It's my turn now."

At work, I'm making a choice to be happy every day.

It just feels better. I'm taking connection Microsteps — I say good morning to everyone with a smile. I work in the lawn and garden department and I always keep the plants watered so they look beautiful for our customers. I enjoy helping people pick out plants and decide what would be best for their yard. A lot of our customers know me and if they're feeling down, they'll confide in me. I have a big heart and always want to help. The other day someone asked me if I'm ready to retire. I said "Nope, forget it. I love my job, I'll retire when I'm 100."

