

\$25,000 WINNER

Gabino Suarez

Return Center #9153 | Waco, TX

SPRING 2024
THRIVE CHALLENGE
GRAND CHAMPION

In October 2021 my older brother, Manuel, passed away from Covid-19. We were very close, and while I was grieving, I was supporting my grown nephew, JP, who was having a hard time. Life felt stressful and I was eating fast food and drinking soda. I was overweight and I'd get out of breath. I really wanted to get healthy for my wife, Katherine, and our teenage sons, JJ and Luis. The boys love sports, and I've always coached their teams, but I didn't have any energy on the baseball field.

A year later, I had a big wake-up call when I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

I knew I had to change my lifestyle. I read an inspiring story on the Thrive app about a guy who sounded a lot like me. Bill LeTexier also had diabetes, and the Thrive Challenge helped him get healthy. So I downloaded the Thrive app and said, "Boom, let's go!"

I began by drinking more water and cutting down on soda.

I added Microsteps like healthy food swaps. Instead of chips, I'll eat nuts or cucumber with lemon, which has the crunch I like. I also quit getting candy from the vending machine at work; I'll have an apple instead. I educated myself about nutrition — it was eye-opening, noticing how much salt and sugar there was in food we'd been eating, like deli meat. I began grilling instead of frying, too. One of our favorite dinners is grilled lemon pepper chicken with salad. I still treat myself to ice cream sometimes, but not too much. For dessert, we'll usually have fruit; we all love watermelon.

Before the Challenge I wasn't exercising so I started slowly by walking 1,000 steps a day.

Gradually, I built up to three mile walks, and then I began jogging and weight training. My energy increased, and I noticed my muscles were a little more toned. It felt awesome. And now I have more energy and fun when I'm coaching 13-year-old Luis's team. Baseball's a big deal in our family. My 16-year-old, JJ, will help me coach, and Katherine's the Team Mom, in charge of our activities and videoing the games.

After work, Katherine and I go for walks along the trails near our home.

We appreciate the wildlife. There are roadrunners and beautiful birds, like red cardinals, and we've even seen a wild pig! We enjoy spending time away from the hustle and bustle. We're also dancing again, something we loved to do when we first met. We get dressed up and go to the dance hall down the street, and we have a blast.

Over time, I lost a few pounds and I could breathe more easily.

Then a year ago I got a call to say I'd won the Thrive Challenge. I teared up. It hit me that I'd been through hard times and I'd achieved so much. To celebrate, we went on a cruise to the Bahamas. But that wasn't the end of my story. I said, "I can't stop now." Thrive has become a way of life; I do it because it works. In the past two years I've lost about 50 pounds. I've lowered my A1C and my blood pressure is now in a normal range. I'm still taking medication for diabetes, but my doctor is very happy — she says I've done a wonderful job committing to a healthy lifestyle.

At work, I'm becoming a better manager.

With Thrive I've learned to listen patiently and communicate clearly with my team of 15. If I get into a stressful situation, I'll watch a calming Thrive Reset. I've been talking to people in different departments and asking them how I can help them. People at work have noticed how much I've changed. They come up to me to ask about Thrive, and I'll help get them started. I've inspired about 100 people to download the Thrive app, and it makes me grin from ear to ear because I know it's a win-win situation for them and their families.

I'm moving forward with my career.

I'm getting my certification in supply chain management through Walmart's Live Better U program, and I'm also a certified electrician. My goal is to become a maintenance operation manager. There are days when I still struggle, but I've learned to prioritize my tasks and studies. When I'm hard on myself, this is one of the Microsteps I take: *When your inner critic flares up, pause and repeat a positive affirmation.* I take a deep breath and say to myself, "Gabino, you're a great leader and a good person. You can handle anything."

I still miss my brother, but I'm finding it easier to deal with my grief.

My faith helps. We go to church every Sunday and have a strong spiritual community — I feel blessed. Gratitude helps too. I'm grateful for the simple things, like grilling in the yard with my family. We'll pitch or hit balls and put on country music; right now we're listening to Parker McCollum, who the boys turned us onto.

My nephew, JP, and I started running together — I can't believe how strong I'm getting.

In January he asked me to do a half marathon with him. I was like, "Man, you're crazy!" But then I thought it would be cool to run with him, so I said, "I'll do it," and we started training. It was tough running 13 miles, but I had a blast. When I got to the finish line JP was waiting. He was like, "Wow man, you did it!" We shed a few tears and it was a wonderful feeling.

This year I turn 50, and I feel amazing.

Two years ago I could barely walk one mile. I never ever thought I'd be able to run 13 miles. I did it by putting in the work and staying committed. My next goal? I want to run another half marathon — maybe with the whole family.

