

And that's just what they've done, improving their health and neighborhood at the same time

By Gabriel Ramirez
Special to MÁS

Spider-Man might have the skills to defeat Venom and the Sandman, but he's got nothing on a group of vigilant moms, who have united to start a fitness revolution and create a positive change in their neighborhood at the same time.

Known as the Greenfield Walking Group, this group of women spend their mornings, 8 to 9:30 a.m., Monday through Friday, walking around Stiern Park on Monitor Street in south Bakersfield.

Sure, they walk and talk and exercise.

But they also keep an eye on the area's streets.

In many ways, the Greenfield Walking Group is a roving neighborhood watch with members who are establishing and maintaining some great, healthy habits.

"These moms have been responsible for many positive changes in their own neighborhood, but more importantly, to their health and the health of

their children," said Jennifer Lopez, Healthy Living Outreach Facilitator, who works with the grassroots group. "They have shown the motivation and dedication to learning more about how they can not only help themselves but their neighborhoods as well."

So who exactly are the members of this League of Super Moms, ready to fight for good health and a good neighborhood in a single bound — or in this case, single stroll?

Currently, they are 60 Greenfield residents — mostly women, and some bring their kids along, even in strollers — who have the support of the Kern County Obesity Prevention Task Force of the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program.

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PHOTO BY TYLER THOMPSON

These moms were made for walking

PHOTO BY TYLER THOMPSON
Stretching exercises are also part of the Greenfield Walking Group's regular routine.



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Two birds with one stone — In many ways, this group of walking moms is like a roving neighborhood watch. They get in healthy exercise while also keeping an eye on the streets.

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Originally, 25 residents met at a nutrition class and were given the opportunity to begin a walking group through the Greenfield Family Resource Center.

The group has now been walking since October.

"Group members not only form bonds with each other as they walk around the park, they invite community organizations who can help them access information and resources they need to make healthy, transformative community changes," said Lopez.

The moms have gone through informational sessions, including top-

began walking to better her health and now does it to set an example for her family and community.

"One of the things we do to better the neighborhood is report graffiti when we see it," she said. "We also report lights that are broken, stray dogs and broken bottles and needles we find at the park."

The group has also spilled the beans on speeders and has meetings with the police to talk about issues of concern around the neighborhood.

"We have had a lot of satisfaction by doing what we do. We have become better individuals," Perez said. "One of our highlights was when Mayor Harvey Hall sent a bus for the

— and the only one from the Central Valley — to be recognized as a "Hero Mom" for making a change to live a healthier life with their family and community.

The "Hero Mom" recognitions were sponsored by the California Department of Public Health.

"It was amazing and emotional. I felt very important and it just felt nice," Perez said. "I felt very proud, and now I feel even more committed to continue being an example."

The walking group has also been a huge support for Leticia Encima, 39. Encima began walking with the group last February after suffering from depression and nervousness.

Encima said that it used to be an inspiration she hopes that it can help other children and others in the neighborhood to be healthy and happy.

"If we set our minds to it, we can accomplish it."

The group meets at Stiern Park on weekday mornings — hours usually beat the heat — get some stretching exercises into their routines in the streets.

And though they may have secret identities now, they have changed into a Super Mom while in a phone booth.