

# 'The doctor can't do it for you'

## Jeff Satkowski beats diabetes on his own

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**LAPEER** — Each year, an estimated 57,000 people in Michigan are diagnosed with diabetes, according to 2014 statistics released by the American Diabetes Association. More than a million Michiganders — which is more than 12 percent of the adult population of the state — are living with the disease, while another 2.7 million people in Michigan are prediabetic.

Diabetes, a metabolic disease in which the body's inability to produce enough insulin causes elevated levels of glucose in the blood, can cause serious complications including heart disease, stroke, amputation, kidney disease and blindness. Each year, more people die from diabetes than from breast cancer and AIDS combined.

In many cases, however, lifestyle changes can make a big difference for people with diabetes — or even those who could be headed in that direction. One local man has actually taken it upon himself to make those changes, and his reward was huge — he no longer relies upon medication to control his blood sugar.

Jeff Satkowski, 38, was in the best shape of his life while he was serving in the Marine Corps from 1997 to 2001. At six feet tall, he ended boot camp at a fit 160 pounds. After that, though, he went to work for Lapeer County Central Dispatch, and like many with an office job, he found himself moving less, eating more, and packing on the pounds. Within five years, he'd put on 100 pounds, topping out at 260.

Satkowski began cleaning up his diet, and dropped 91 of those pounds, but it crept back up to the 220s, and he started having some of the symptoms of diabetes, including extreme thirst, frequent urination, fatigue, blurred vision and neuropathy, or numbness of the feet. He came down with a sinus infection, and while at his doctor's office, he asked to be tested for diabetes,



A decade ago, a sedentary lifestyle led Jeff Satkowski of Lapeer to his highest weight, topping out at 260 pounds. Today, he maintains around 180 pounds, thanks to a sensible diet and regular exercise. He also no longer requires medication to control his blood sugar.

and the result was shocking. His glucose reading was well over 500 mg/dl. To put that into perspective, normal is less than 100 mg/dl and anything over 126 mg/dl is considered diabetic.

He made some changes but said, "the first year or two, I didn't really take the diabetes seriously." Eventually, though, he realized that he valued his health, and didn't want to risk the serious consequences the disease can have, such as causing fingers or toes to have to be amputated.

"A couple years ago, I decided it's time to get serious," he said.

He got a fitness tracker that measures his activity, and he installed the accompanying app, which allows him to track his food intake. A big part of it was refraining from sugary drinks such as Mountain Dew, which he said he used to have often. In fact, he said, he was so thirsty from the diabetes, and he was attempting to quench that thirst with soda, which in turn made the diabetes worse. It was a vicious cycle that he had to choose to break. These days, his daily sugar intake — counting everything he eats and drinks — is less than the amount of sugar in



Photo by Krystal Moralee

Jeff Satkowski, systems administrator for Lapeer County Central Dispatch, is maintaining his weight around 80 pounds lighter than his highest point, and he's used proper diet and regular exercise to eliminate his Type 2 diabetes.

one 20-ounce bottle of the neon yellow soda he once enjoyed daily.

"There are people who drink two liters of this stuff a day," he said.

Satkowski doesn't follow a special diet for diabetes; rather, he eats as everyone is instructed to do for optimal health — lean protein, whole grains, healthy fats and plenty of fruits and

vegetables. He avoids processed, packaged foods and added sugar. Of course, he likes pizza, cheeseburgers and fries, and will enjoy limited amounts of those things occasionally, but he's found that as he eats healthier, his tastes have changed and he doesn't crave or even enjoy the less-healthy things as much as he once did.

In addition, he beat the sedentary nature of his occupation by making it a priority to move. He joined a local gym, and he spends 30 to 40 minutes working out four to five times a week. He also gets up from his desk and walks around for a few minutes every hour.

For Satkowski, making those positive changes has resulted in him no

longer requiring any medication to keep his blood sugar in check.

"So many people rely on medicine, and I hate taking medicine because of all the side effects you can have," he said.

He stopped taking his medication in October after three and a half years, and said his blood sugar is staying consistently where it should be, though he said he will continue to check it to ensure nothing changes.

These days, Satkowski is maintaining his weight around 80 pounds less than his heaviest, and he said he feels fantastic.

"I'm more alert, I'm not sluggish, I'm not tired, I feel like I have more energy, and my knees hurt less because I'm not carrying the weight," he said.

Satkowski admits making healthy lifestyle changes can be a challenge, and it's something that a person has to choose to do, and remain committed to carrying out for the rest of their lives.

"The discipline and the dieting, that's the hardest part," he said. "It's up to you to do it. The doctor can't do it for you."

# Almont names new superintendent with a 5-2 vote

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**ALMONT** — A 5-2 vote Monday night left a roomful of Kimberly VonHiltmayer supporters unhappy and Almont Community Schools with a new superintendent.

After two nights of discussion, the board voted to offer its top job to Bill Kalmar who has been principal at Imlay City High School since August 2014 and an Imlay City educator for 22 years.

Almont school board members failed to reach a decision on the two educators at their Nov. 14 meeting, casting tie votes on both candidates with board member Scott Kmetz absent.

Board members Jon Owens and Jill O'Neil stuck to their earlier position of supporting VonHiltmayer who is principal at Almont Middle School and a 22-year veteran of the district.

"We can go with some we have to make a lot of assumptions about," O'Neil said, "or we can go with someone we know. She and Owens noted that both candidates were very similar and lacked the financial experience the board wanted and argued that VonHiltmayer's track record with the district tipped things in her favor.

Owens argued that her familiarity with the district's staff and facilities would mean she could focus more time on acquiring the needed financial skills and less time settling in.

Kmetz, who was not at a five-hour session on Nov. 14 was at the rest of the board argued the two candidates' merits, said he spent 18 hours on a flight home going over the material. He

## Kalmar intends to build relationships in community

**IMLAY CITY** — With a bachelor of arts degree from Montclair State University in New Jersey, Bill Kalmar came to Imlay City Community Schools in 1994 to teach social studies at Venture High School, the district's alternative education program



Bill Kalmar

He's been with the district ever since. Kalmar was named principal of Imlay City High School in June 2014, following the resignation of Larry Cowger, who left to take a position with Howell Community Schools.

Prior to taking over as principal of the high school Kalmar had been Borland Elementary School's principal for the prior eight years. And before being named principal at Borland, Kalmar had been dean of students at the high school for six years.

During that time he earned a master's degree at Saginaw Valley and an educational specialist's PhD in educational and organizational leadership at Oakland University. His dissertation was on the effect of school of choice on how superintendents run their school district.

Kalmar, who lives in Arcadia Township, said he plans to move his family into the Almont Community Schools district. He's already put in an offer on a house. "I believe it's important to live close by," he said.

Kalmar said Tuesday that he was set to meet Wednesday with outgoing school board president Steve Hoffa and interim Superintendent Tim Edwards to begin the transition process. He said he still has a few things he needs to wrap up in Imlay City. "I'm not going to leave them hanging."

He added that while he'll be switching from blue and gold to orange and black T-shirts and windbreakers, Almont and Imlay City have more similarities than differences. "They both have a great sense of identity and a lot of their values deep down are very similar," Kalmar said.

It's that similarity that drew Kalmar to Almont, he said, noting that he hadn't applied for openings at other nearby school districts because he felt the fit wasn't right.

"If the districts had not been very much the same, I wouldn't have applied," he said. Kalmar said that while the two districts have a great, fun rivalry in sports, they've worked together on a big federal early college grant.

"I see myself as a builder," Kalmar said, adding one of his first priorities will be building strong relationships with the community.

— Phil Foley

agreed with board member John Miles that Kalmar had a slight edge.

Board member John Brzozowski

restated his earlier position that he believed Kalmar was a better communicator.

Steve Edwards, a retired teacher, suggested that since Kmetz and board president Steve Hoffa are leaving at the end of the year, the board should wait for newly-elected Michelle Dupuis-Wangler and Anthony Medley to join the board.

Hoffa responded that it was the sitting board's responsibility to make the decision and that while the two new board members were invited to sit in on the interviews, they don't have a vote until January.

Board members hired Tim Edwards, who retired in 2009 as superintendent of the Sanilac Intermediate School District, in August to serve as interim superintendent, through the end of December. Hoffa said the district needed a transition period between Edwards and the new superintendent.

Hoffa tried for a second time to reach what he called "consensus," but Owens and O'Neil wouldn't budge. After they voted for VonHiltmayer, board member Stephen Mako called for a motion for board members to pledge their support for Kalmar.

O'Neil called the move "insulting." She and Owens both said they would support the new superintendent, regardless of who they voted for.

"I have no intention of tripping anyone up," O'Neil said. "We've made a decision. I don't want to hear about it anymore" Owens said, "We've come to a conclusion and we need to move on."

Kalmar replaced Joe Candella, who left in July after five years with Almont to take over as head of Uby Community Schools.

The board still has to complete contract negotiations with Kalmar, who's expected to step into the superintendent's office after the first of the year.