



ORCAS POWER & LIGHT COOPERATIVE

Main Office: 183 Mt. Baker Road, Eastsound, WA 98245-9413
(360) 376-3500 • Fax: (360) 376-3505 • www.opalco.com

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Orcas Power & Light Cooperative
Contact: Suzanne Olson
360-376-3537
solson@opalco.com

OPALCO EMPLOYEE POPULATION SHRINKING: 22 PARTICIPANTS DROP **451.7 POUNDS** IN WELLNESS CHALLENGE!

Orcas Power & Light Cooperative (OPALCO) is a member-owned, member-operated electric utility that cares about its co-op family of employee-member-owners. OPALCO's commitment to a healthy workplace includes a wellness program that encourages—and rewards—healthy habits. OPALCO gets up to a six percent discount on its insurance rates (through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association – NRECA) in exchange for hosting a wellness program—and then is required to spend that savings on employee wellness activities and incentives. This year, OPALCO hosted a sixteen-week weight loss program: the Move It! & Lose It! Challenge. More than 50% of OPALCO employees participated in the Challenge and the 22 participants who finished the Challenge lost a whopping combined 451.7 pounds!

The Challenge was open to all employees, spouses and retirees who are enrolled in OPALCO's insurance program. Participants formed teams—with names like “Slim Chance” and “Transformers”—and competed to earn participation points and lose weight, measured in percentage loss. The program included weekly challenges that addressed personal growth, nutrition, fitness and team work which helped participants to learn and practice new skills and build healthy habits. Challenge activities included journaling, calorie counting and nutrition education, replacing leisure time with physical activity, trying out new exercise modalities, team meals and team hikes. The friendly competition was a great morale booster and lent itself to many humorous situations—and also built a workplace culture of peer support and encouragement.

“This was the most successful, fun and productive wellness program we've run—we really saw the results,” said General Manager Randy Cornelius. “I'm very proud of the award winners—and everyone who participated in the Challenge. I hope we can continue the program—and that we can all keep the weight off!”

Prizes were awarded monthly at company-wide “Smoothie Happy Hour” events (non-alcoholic, of course) to the team with the most participation points and to the individual with the most improved percentage weight loss. The grand prizes awarded cash to the team and the individual with the greatest percentage weight loss, and the team with the most participation points.

The top team prize went to “Thin Sin City” of Friday Harbor with a combined weight loss of 12.11%. The team includes Beth Anderson (Manager of Technical and Energy Services and Island Network), Kerry Anderson (General Foreman), Lindsey Pritchard (Software Specialist) and Elisa Scott-Howard (Member Services Representative – now Energy Services Specialist). The biggest individual loser was John Olson (spouse of Communication Specialist Suzanne Olson) of “The Shrinking Violets” of Eastsound with a super-human loss of 19.05%. Team “Ctrl-Alt-Del” won the top participation prize, completing every single weekly challenge and every possible bonus challenge. Team members include Nancy Loomis (Assistant Manager of Finance and Member Services), Kevin Loomis (spouse of Nancy), Michelle Beal (Accountant) with support from Sylva Edwards (Michelle’s mom).

More than half of all 22 finishers lost more than 10% of their body weight. As the seven teams gave their final presentations on June 23rd, it was clear that the Challenge had more than met its goals to: 1) Create a fun, supporting and challenging program that invites employees to change their habits toward weight loss and better overall health; 2) Promote a healthy camaraderie in the workplace; and 3) Improve the health of OPALCO wellness program participants.

Team “Ctrl-Alt-Del” called the Challenge “a life-changing experience” and reported, “We are committed to continue the quest for healthier bodies and minds beyond the Challenge. We feel that we did not simply diet, but changed our eating, exercise, and lifestyle habits for good. We have further challenged ourselves to (continue on through) December. We believe that we are now armed with the proper tools and coaching towards successfully changing to a healthy life style.”

“The Shrinking Violets” summed up their experience in a song sung to the tune of the Brady Bunch theme that began, “Here’s the story about a group of chubbies / Who were happy but their clothes were too tight / They were all pretty good at exercising / But ate too much at night.” The last verse summed up their success: “Now this group has gone down several sizes / The results are in—it’s much more than a hunch / The Shrinking Violets have truly shrunken / We eat raw vegetables for lunch.”

The Challenge culminated in a field day and awards ceremony at Cascade Lake in Moran State Park where teams competed in a pentathlon of quirky (and physically challenging) events including pedal boat races, a green smoothie eating contest, scavenger hunt/nature hike, water balloon toss and puzzle solving contest. The meal was a potluck—and it was significant to note that there was a distinct absence of desserts on the picnic tables—proving that good habits are hard to break! Plans are already underway for another season of Move It! & Lose It! in 2011.

OPALCO is a member-owned cooperative electrical utility serving more than 11,000 members on 20 islands in San Juan County. OPALCO provides electricity that is 95% greenhouse-gas free and is predominately generated by hydro-electric plants. OPALCO was founded in 1937 to bring electricity to rural islanders.

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Photos and captions:

- 1. Team “Thin Sin City” before and after (Beth & Kerry Anderson, Lindsey Pritchard, Elisa Scott-Howard)*
- 2. John Olson of “The Shrinking Violets” before and after*
- 3. Team “L&L Lite” after (Ed and Keri Lago—and kids)*
- 4. Dottie Cornelius and Bev Madan of the “Transformers” complete the pedal boat race*