

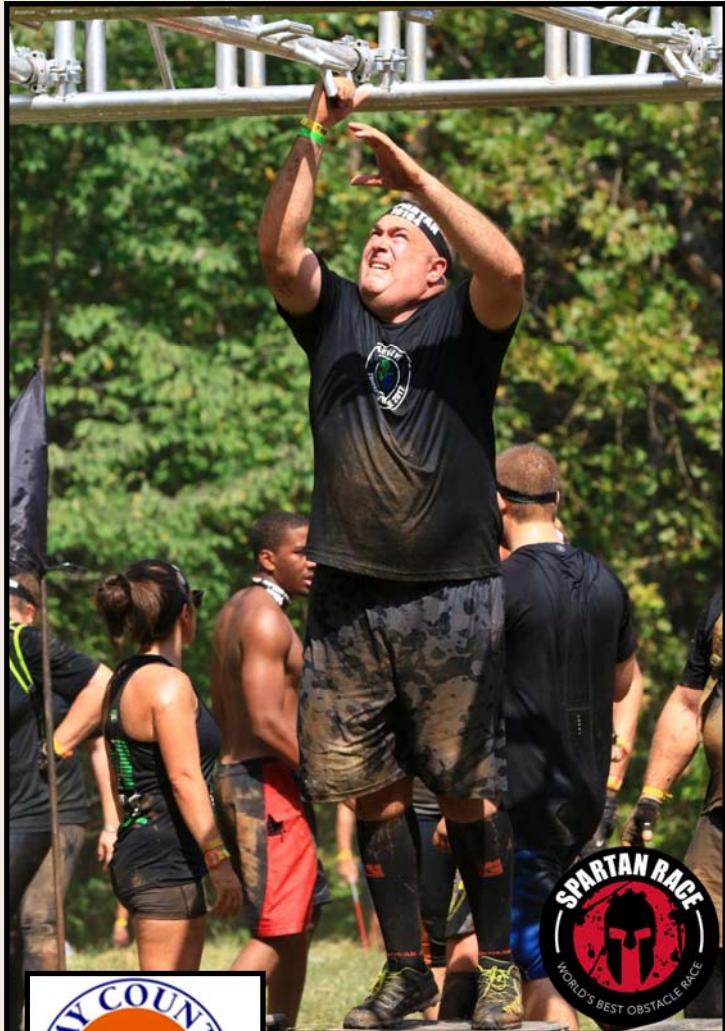
Several Bay County employees are getting their hands – and everything else – dirty through Team Evolve, a physical fitness-centered social group that participates in obstacle course races, also known as “mud runs,” throughout the country.

In early 2017, Bay County Manager Bob Majka and his wife, Jennifer, were trying to lose weight and get into shape by working out and managing their nutrition on their own, to no avail.

“It just wasn’t happening,” Majka said.

In April 2017, both Majkas were invited to join Team Evolve, led by fitness coach and nutritionist J.T. Thompson and comprised primarily of employees of the Bay County Sheriff’s Office and the Bay County Jail and their family members.

Since he started, Majka said, he has lost 40 pounds. But he’s gained a lot more through being accountable to his teammates and to himself.



“We have been focused here at the county on getting employees to make positive changes with regard to healthy living,” Majka said. “I viewed this as not just an opportunity to lose weight, but also to lead by example.”

Team Evolve participates in various Spartan, Warrior Dash and Fun in the Sun-type races throughout the southeast, which include dozens of obstacles such as traversing pools of muddy, sloppy water; scaling walls; climbing cargo nets, ropes and monkey bars; carrying buckets of water or sand (or both) that can weigh up to 80 pounds; distance running; and throwing spears.

Engaging in such behavior requires training and practice, and Team Evolve meets for two-hour training sessions twice weekly and members train individually on the other days of the week.

Total commitment to the program is critical, said Thompson, who has more than a quarter century in the fitness industry and includes working for NBC’s The Biggest Loser and training Olympic and World Championship Wrestling stars on his resume.

“The single biggest requirement is full commitment or nothing,” Thompson said, noting that the weekly trainings and at least a minimum of competition races aren’t negotiable. “Team Evolve” literally evolved to about 70 members from just a handful of his clients who needed motivation.

“Competition is the best thing to keep people focused,” he said, “so I signed them up for a Spartan race.”



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Thompson said he became a certified Spartan trainer, and over time the group's numbers began to swell, drawing similarly fitness-minded people together.

"This has turned into more of a family type event than it is just a workout," Thompson said. "I have a lot of people on the team who were in really bad spots when they came in, not just physically, but mentally. We're saving some butts."

Good nutrition is key, too, Majka said, and Thompson helps team members dial in their eating habits to fuel their bodies to accomplish tasks.

"The weight loss just comes with it," he said.

For former Army Ranger and now **Bay County Code Enforcement investigator Tom Harris**, being a member of Team Evolve evokes fond memories of the intensive training he did while he was in the military 30 years ago.

"A lot of these races take place at military installations," Harris said, "one was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and for me it was like going back home. I really enjoy doing it so much, for an old man."

Harris trained for half a year before participating in the race in Kentucky and longer prior to another race at Fort Benning. He said the camaraderie amongst the participants got him through the difficult regimen.

"When I was in the military, they teach you everything is about teamwork and being able to work together to accomplish a mission, and it's the same here," Harris said. "We're not fighting a war, but we're fighting the elements and everything else you've got to fight to get through the competition. It's a tight-knit group of people."

**Jerry Walden, Bay County Engineering and Robert Vinson, Bay County Mosquito Control** are also Team Evolve members.

Thompson limits the number of available spots on the team, though he currently has three open. For more information about how to join Team Evolve, call Thompson at (850) 276-5343 .



GETTING DOWN AND DIRTY