

## Forks Over Knives Got the Ball Rolling to Better Health

*Mary Lou and Wes Beavers belong to the Eat Smart, Live Longer Club, with over 600 members!*

*by J. Lanning Smith*

“I thought they were nuts,” NHA member Mary Lou Beavers said about her two sisters, Karen Heitman and Leslie Haas (also NHA members) when they first told her in December 2012 that they were going whole food, plant-based. Mary Lou had made a career of teaching fourth and fifth graders, and one aspect of her teaching was the importance of a balanced diet. She taught her students to put a meat, a starch, a vegetable and some milk (or milk product) on their plate at each meal. She was particularly vigilant about making sure her own children got enough milk to ensure “strong bones.”

When Mary Lou met her husband, Wes, he did not consume any dairy products. He found that dairy bothered his stomach. But from Mary Lou’s standpoint at that time, that was unhealthy and she believed he needed to be eating some dairy products. She convinced him to eat yogurt, which he liked and he began eating a cup of fruit-flavored yogurt each day.

But then Mary Lou’s sisters encouraged the two of them to watch the documentary *Forks Over Knives*, as well as Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn’s lecture to the city of Medina, Ohio on YouTube. Her sisters also invited them to a plant-based dinner, which was delicious. Armed with this new knowledge and the experience of a wonderful meal, Mary Lou and Wes decided to give whole food, plant-based eating a try.

It was a positive experience. Even though she had been athletic all of her life, participating in sports in school, and being a cheerleader in high school, Mary Lou had put on a little more weight than she wanted to over the years. But as she began to eat whole, plant-based foods, the pounds quickly melted away. She lost 17 pounds and is now at a weight where she is comfortable being. Previous to going whole food, plant-based, Mary Lou had been spending time at the gym trying to work the weight off, but it wouldn’t budge until she actually changed the way she ate.

Both Mary Lou and Wes saw their cholesterol drop.

Both had been on Lipitor, a cholesterol-lowering drug. Wes was also on a prescription for acid reflux, which he was taking regularly at the time. Since going whole food, plant-based in January 2013, he has been able to get off of that



*Mary Lou with her husband Wes*

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medication as well, and he no longer suffers from acid reflux disease.

They started their journey into the plant-based way of eating by looking at the foods they enjoyed eating and determining what could be eaten without meat or animal products. One of the first foods they decided on was spaghetti, which they both really enjoyed. They decided they could leave the meat out of the sauce and they could use whole wheat pasta noodles instead of the enriched spaghetti noodles that they were used to eating. She made it for dinner, and Wes remarked, “Not bad.” They were on their way. Since then, they have not brought any meat or dairy products into the house. And Wes has given up his daily cup of yogurt.

Mary Lou is an avid gardener, which is a hobby she learned from her dad. She grows most of the vegetables she and Wes eat, and she is able to share the fruits of her labor with her sisters and neighbors as well. She is an active board member and volunteer for Okatie Farmers, Sun City’s gardening club and she works with the club to provide fresh produce to Bluffton Self-Help, an organiza-

tion that exists to help locals in need of food, clothing, and educational and financial assistance.

### The Eat Smart Live Longer Club and The NHA

In May 2013, Mary Lou co-founded the Sun City Hilton Head Eat Smart Live Longer Club with her two sisters. At their first meeting, they had approximately 40 interested residents, but that quickly bloomed to the over 600 members that it is today. Mary Lou has stayed active in the club since its founding, and she currently serves as the club's vice president.

Two of the biggest activities that she is involved with are running the club's library of over 200 books, cookbooks, and DVDs as well as leading grocery store tours for members of the club. Her grocery store tours are very popular and have been enjoyed by club members in groups of approximately 10 at a time. Her tours teach people what to look for on packaged foods, how to read labels, what to avoid, what foods to emphasize, how to prepare some of the foods found in the grocery store, and more. Each tour lasts about two hours, and Mary Lou is very patient about thoroughly answering all questions by the participants.

The Beavers have been members of the National Health Association for over two years. They met Mark and Wanda Huberman when the Hubermans came to Hilton Head Island for vacation a couple years ago. Stopping in at one of the best plant-based restaurants on the island, Pure Natural Market, they talked to the owner, Tracy Owens, who told them about the Eat Smart Live Longer Club in Sun City. Interested in learning more about the club, the Hubermans asked to be put in contact with the three sisters, who then invited them to dinner at the home of Leslie Haas. Mary Lou met the Hubermans for the first time at that dinner.




Mary Lou assisting with label reading during her grocery store tours.



Mary Lou working the library table for the ESLL club.

board member of the club, has played a significant role in that.

It can truly be said that Mary Lou, through her hard work and her enthusiasm for the whole food, plant-based way of eating, has improved the lives of hundreds of people over the last six years since going whole food, plant-based. And she and her husband have both been rewarded with improved health and greater energy. She says, "I have more energy now than I did when I was in my thirties." In the end, she now acknowledges that her sisters had not gone nuts. Instead, she is thankful that they discovered this healthy lifestyle, and she is thankful for organizations like the National Health Association, who continue to put out the word about eating this way. 

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lost 150 pounds and gotten off of all prescription medications through following a whole food, plant-based lifestyle. He has two blog sites at [FinallyOurTime.com](http://FinallyOurTime.com) and at [TheArtofPlant-BasedMealCreation.com](http://TheArtofPlant-BasedMealCreation.com), and he has written and taken photographs for past issues of *Health Science* magazine.