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Tales From the Scales: Thomas's Promises

"I don't suspect we lost much," said Thomas's Promises team captain Mario Browne of the Center for Minority Health as he anticipated this week's midpoint weigh-in.

The CMH team rose from an initial rank of 185th in the first week of the competition to 152nd after week 4. Their strategy for tipping the scales even more in their favor: Regardless of the weather, no heavy corduroys or sweaters are allowed at the weigh-in, Browne joked.

Competition really isn't high on their list of incentives, he said. "We're not so much interested in the race; we're more interested in the social support and the motivation to do something," he said.

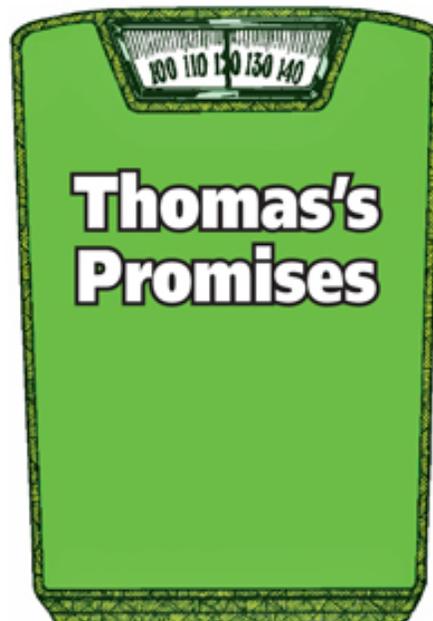
That's taking shape as CMH director Stephen Thomas has supported the team's commitment to exercise twice a week at the Kingsley Association in East Liberty, where the CMH Healthy Black Family project offers classes ranging from body toning to African dance.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, instead of coming directly to campus, Browne is among the CMH staffers who start their day with a 45-minute yoga class at Kingsley.

Although the team has concentrated on moving more, team members also have made some changes in their eating habits. One has stocked up on water in the office and traded sweets for yogurt with frozen berries stirred in. Veronica Sansing said she'd committed to giving up pork, chocolate and fried food, although when the Girl Scout thin mints arrived, she decided two out of three would have to do.

Tiffany Kinney said some members have taken to bringing their lunches instead of going out to eat. She was pleasantly surprised that bringing soup for lunch saves cash as well as calories.

Browne said the hardest part of the weight race has been dedicating time to it, noting that his co-workers have high-stress jobs with multiple responsibilities. His lament is familiar. "You never have enough hours in the day to do it all," he said, adding that it's often hard to escape the desk at lunchtime to take a walk or



a class, or even to find something healthful to eat.

"The American lifestyle is the hurdle," he said, thankful for his director's support of the team's goal to exercise at Kingsley. "We look at it as a quality improvement," Browne said. Reducing stress through exercise will increase productivity and make them better employees, he said.

Plus, practicing what is preached makes an impact —especially when an exercise class teacher can acknowledge the presence of co-workers from the staff. "We are public health. We have to teach. We have to model what we teach," Browne said.

On a recent rainy Tuesday, Browne unrolled his yoga mat and slowly began stretching along with co-workers Kinney and Sansing under the guidance of CMH health coach Felicia Savage.

The slow movements and the focus on holding each position are hard, said Sansing, who is more accustomed to the faster movement of dance. Barefoot, Savage padded quietly across the exercise studio's hardwood, encouraging the students to concentrate on their breathing as she helped them fine-tune their technique.

Although the movement is at a snail's pace, the workout is intense.

Browne said later in the day someone in the office pointed out to him that he was smiling. He hadn't quite realized it, but even though the exercise class was hard, after he'd finished and showered, he felt good. And it showed.

—Kimberly K. Barlow