

Alvin Shaver

Walking the Talk



We have teamed up with BlueCross® BlueShield® of South Carolina for associates to share their stories of how they live Southeastern Strong. If you want to share your story, email us at seflstrong@sefl.com.

Even though Alvin Shaver has lost 60 pounds and gone from a men's size XL to a medium, Southeastern's director of compensation and benefits still sometimes has a hard time realizing it when he looks in the mirror. "Being a healthy weight is a relatively new experience," Shaver said. "I was always the chubby kid. Growing up, I often wore a coat to cover up the chunky."

Today, at 51, Shaver has improved his health and well-being. He says it's much easier to find clothes that fit him well. He takes no regular medications. In fact, his doctor was able to take him off of medicine to control his heart rate. Shaver's blood pressure, cholesterol and other key health markers are ideal. When he bought a life insurance policy recently, the company gave him its super-preferred rate at double the coverage.

A Southeastern Strong success story, Shaver is also the person who oversaw the well-being program's creation and launch. Along with years of experience in human

resources, he had a special qualification for creating the program – his own journey toward better health.

Being Ripped Does Not Equate to Well-Being for Everyone

"A few years ago, you couldn't go to a human resources conference without people talking about wellness," Shaver said. "But it often sounded to me like you'd have to train for a marathon or do CrossFit to qualify," he said. "Like, you gotta be ripped to have well-being."

Shaver found it hard to imagine himself in that way. He also knew that a person's well-being comes from more than just weight. So, Southeastern Strong focuses not just on physical health, but on other building blocks of a satisfying life – spiritual and emotional health, financial stability, career growth and community involvement. The program's goal is to give associates benefits and resources to help them improve their overall well-being.

As he worked with BlueCross and fellow SEFL teammates to craft and refine Southeastern Strong, Shaver knew he didn't want to be a hypocrite. "If I'm going to jump on a bandwagon, I first take a look at myself," he said.

A Chunky Childhood

The firstborn of three children, Shaver grew up on a small family farm in a rural area near Silverstreet, S.C. Plumpness ran in his family. "Genetics are not on my side," he said. "A sign at our family's lake house says it all: 'We don't skinny dip, we chunky dunk.' "

Sports were not his thing. In school, music became an important part of his life. He played tuba and sang. And at Newberry College, where he majored in business, he continued participating in music groups. He also tried weight lifting to fulfill his physical education credit, but he didn't really like it.

"I've always been a little intimidated by the gym," he said. "It goes back to that chubby kid in the coat. I associated gyms with people who have perfect bodies."

Shaver did like a young woman he met at college, LaDona Ramsey. Ramsey loved Shaver, extra cushioning and all. The couple married in 1989 and had two children, Marley, now 22, and Corey, now 20.

Practicing What He Preaches

After college, Shaver worked as an internal auditor for a bank and later for an insurance company. A hurricane almost literally blew his career in a different direction. Massive claims after two devastating hurricanes led his insurance company to downsize him. "They kept me on staff, but moved me to human resources," Shaver said. "They realized I was a people person."

Shaver loved HR and went on to work for several other organizations as HR director. His favorite job before SEFL was as director of HR for South Carolina's largest nursing home, where he felt he had a positive impact.

It was while working in the medical setting that Shaver started to think more about improving his health. "Of course, there's a difference between knowing something and doing it," he said.

He later took a higher paying bank job. For a while, he so missed the nursing home residents that he grew depressed and gained weight as a result. Over the ensuing decade, Shaver's weight waxed and waned.

When he accepted the job at SEFL in 2013, Shaver knew immediately he was in the right place. "I have a real sense of purpose here, and that is very important to me,"



Before: Alvin Shaver



After: Alvin Shaver

he said. As Shaver worked to build Southeastern Strong, his weight began to bother him more. The spark that set him on his health journey was the decision to appear in a benefits video in 2014. "They say the camera adds 10 pounds," he said. "I decided I'm going to lose those 10 pounds."

By making better food choices and taking frequent walks around his Chapin, South Carolina, neighborhood, Shaver met his goal. No one was more surprised than he to realize how much he enjoyed long walks, and his efforts helped him lose another 20 pounds in 2015. "I didn't restrict myself from any food, but I did limit portions and frequency," he said. "So I wouldn't eat a burger often, but I would have one occasionally."

In 2016, around the time Southeastern Strong was officially launched, Shaver was determined to lose more weight. In early June, he walked two hours daily on a family vacation at the beach, simply because he enjoyed it. The boost in exercise revved his metabolism. Before long, Shaver had lost another 10 pounds.

Last fall, Shaver joined a gym, adding the elliptical machine and weight training to his routine. That ultimately led to another 20-pound weight loss. Shaver now realizes that many people at the gym are just like him, and he loves to go there. He regularly exercises five to six days each week. He eats healthy – usually – and weighs himself frequently for accountability. If he knows he'll be eating richer food the next day, he burns extra calories ahead of time. Setting "bite-sized" goals was one of his most important steps, he said.

"My first goal was to lose 10 pounds, not 60 pounds," he said. His wife, LaDona, is surprised that he's stuck with it this long, he said. "She keeps kidding me and saying, 'Don't get too skinny!'"

Happy with his weight for the first time in his life, Shaver said his dream is to see Southeastern Strong work for each associate in at least one area of his or her life. Walking the talk has let him help himself while leading others to find what improves their quality of life.

Do you want to lose weight or quit smoking?

SEFL teamed up with BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina to bring you stories of associates who are living Southeastern Strong. The goal is to inspire you and point you to resources that can help you make positive changes in your own life. Rally®, a digital health platform free to SEFL-insured associates, can help you lose weight, eat healthy, quit smoking and move more. To sign up for Rally, go to www.SouthCarolinaBlues.com and log in to **My Health Toolkit**®. Select the **Wellness** tab, then select **Rally** from the drop-down menu and follow the instructions.



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