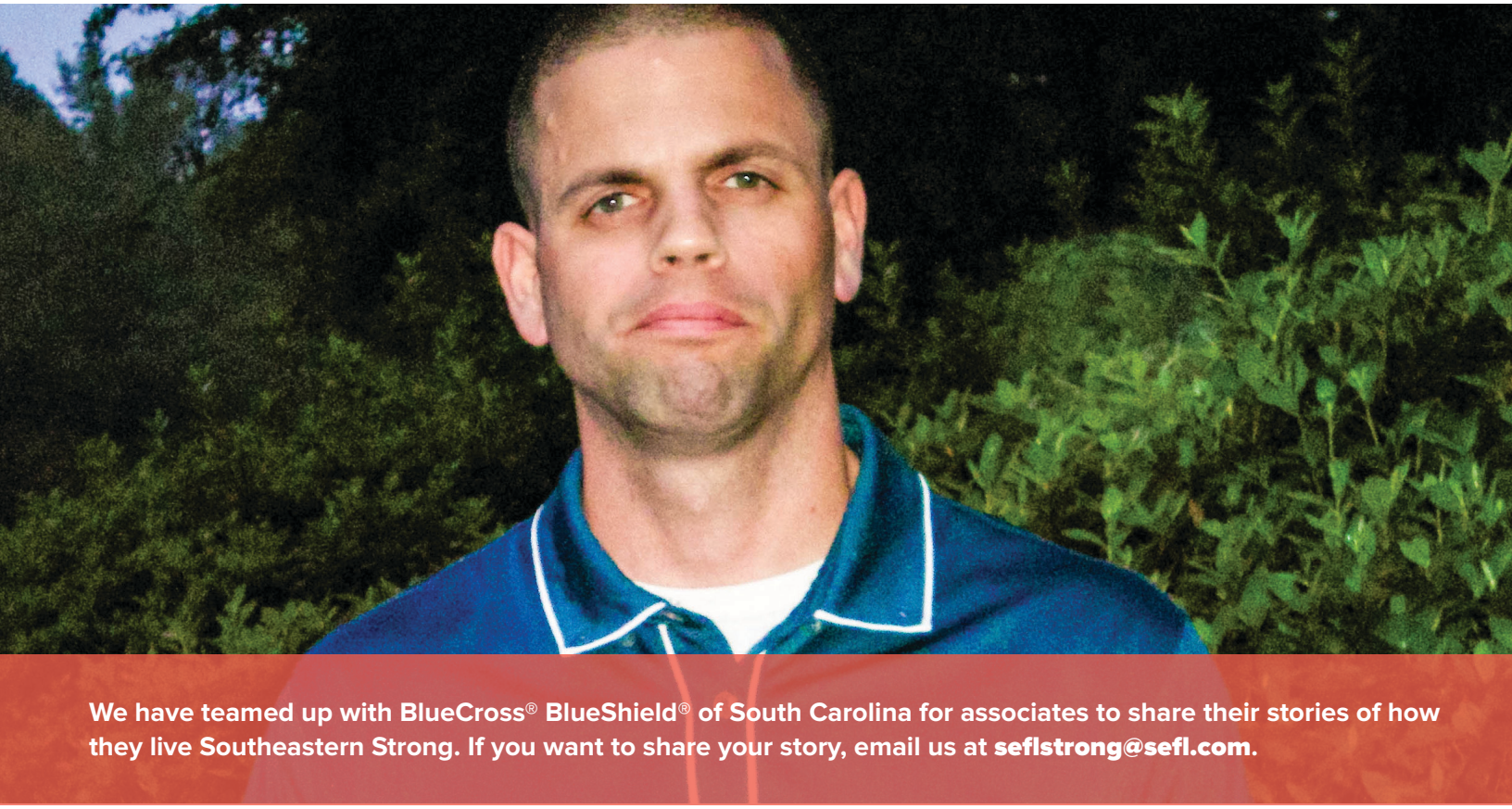
Robbie McLain

Wake-Up Calls Spark 100-Pound Weight Loss



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.

In the spring of 2014, his heart pounding, Robbie McLain was rushed to the emergency room suffering from what turned out to be a severe panic attack. "The hospital staff said my blood pressure was at stroke level," the Southeastern Freight Lines computer specialist said. "I was only 27 years old. They gave me a prescription for beta blockers."

Until that day, McLain had never thought much about the more than 100 pounds he'd gained since leaving the Marines five years earlier — or how the extra weight might be affecting his health. "I thought, I'm young, and maybe in 10 years I'll start worrying about that," he said. But a few weeks after his ER visit, he got another shock while looking at recent family photos. "My Lord!" he said. "I knew I was heavy, but I didn't know I looked that heavy."

His wife, Kim, who works in in SEFL's Pricing Department, "was too sweet and patient" to nag him about his weight. But soon after the ER incident, she brought home a scale. "I couldn't believe I was about to round the 300-pound mark," McLain said.

For years, though, he'd been ignoring warning signs:

- Walking the short distance from the SEFL parking lot to the building always left him winded.
- He battled anxiety and depression.
- He lacked energy for simple tasks or even playing with his daughter.
- He was plagued by insomnia.
- He had to shop for clothes continually. "It seemed easier to keep buying new, larger clothes than lose some weight."
- He knew obesity ran in his family and that it had taken a dire toll in some cases. "My first cousin, my aunt, my grandfather, my late mother and my late grandmother were all overweight. My grandmother died of a massive heart attack."

Two and a half years ago, McLain landed a job at Southeastern Freight Lines' Support Center. He loved his job, but tended to drown the day's pressures in food – having a half-gallon of ice cream at bedtime, for instance. Before he knew it, his weight had climbed to 275 pounds. Then came the ER visit, the shock at seeing himself in photos and the prospect of lifelong dependency on medication. He thought about his wife and daughter, and about his excuses for not changing his lifestyle. But the series of wake-up calls he received in rapid succession shifted McLain's attitude, and he began a slow, steady journey to improve his health.

How He Did It

With his wife's support, McLain decided to focus on tracking calories. "I wanted to change the way I ate for good, not just until I lost a certain amount of weight. We cut out refined starches, red meat, sugar, and we stopped eating vegetables out of a can," McLain said. "We started eating only fresh vegetables, ground turkey or chicken breast, and whole grains at dinner. Since then, I've saved some farmers' jobs — I've eaten so much zucchini, squash and broccoli." He also cut portion sizes. "That was hard for me," he said. "Some nights I went to bed hungry. Water became my best friend, because it helped fill me up. I still drink one gallon of water a day."

For lunch, instead of going out for fast food, McLain ate a salad he brought from home. "Once a week, I'd go to Publix and buy five of those ready-made 300-calorie salads," he said. "I'd eat one of those every day."

McLain calculated how many calories he'd have to cut each week to lose a pound. He wrote down what he ate at every meal and the calories he consumed. "A grown man should eat no more than 2,500 calories a day to maintain his weight," he said. "Go to Hardee's for one burger, that's 900 calories. A 20-ounce soda is 290 calories!"

At first, McLain focused on diet alone. "I didn't want to exercise because I was embarrassed — I thought I looked like a beached whale," he said. But in November 2014, after he'd been eating healthier for five months and had lost about 30 pounds, he ventured into a gym to use the elliptical machine. He started visiting the gym four days a week, later adding weights to his routine.

"I set goals as I went along," he said. "At first, I just wanted to lose 30 more pounds, but once I reached that goal, I thought, let me see if I can get down to 190. Then when I reached that goal, I thought, let me see if I can lose an even 100."

Before: Robbie McLain

After: Robbie McLain

McLain's Life Today

Today, McLain and his wife, Kim, are preparing for the birth of their second child – a son – in the spring. "Right now, I can honestly say I'm in the best shape of my life – better, even, than when I was in the Marines at Parris Island," McLain said. "I weigh 169 pounds. I like to play with my daughter now because I have so much energy. In fact, I feel like I'm 18." He sleeps well now and hasn't had an anxiety attack in more than a year.

McLain goes to the gym six days a week, usually right after work. He typically spends around 90 minutes a day working out, taking Sundays off. He and Kim eat out twice a week, but they go to sit-down restaurants with healthier options.

He also exercises during the workday. "I try to walk the stairs about six times a day," he said. "I rarely take the elevator unless I'm carrying something." Kim McLain wants to start working out once their baby is born, and McLain said he's "looking forward to helping her with that."

Being more fit and healthy has boosted his confidence. "I know that I can set my mind to anything and do it," he said. He also gets a kick out of the shocked responses of people who haven't seen him in a while. "They go, 'Oh God, you've lost so much weight, you look great,'" McLain said, chuckling. "In fact, my wife is about sick of all the compliments now. She's started telling me, 'Just get over yourself.' "

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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99250-7-2017

Originally Published Fourth Quarter 2015