You answered the bell again, Hamilton County.

A challenge initiated in 2009 was issued for the fifth straight year in 2013 and we were pleased to see that extra motivation apparently helped prime the pump for healthier living in many who stepped up to the plate. Hats off to the winners and congratulations to all who accepted the challenge and gave it a go.

A total of 67 two-person teams signed up back in March, stepping on the scale with a goal of coming back lighter and leaner 100 days later. As you may have read in our earlier coverage, participants lost a combined 521 pounds.

Leading the way were Tom and Kim Wanek of Aurora, who lost a combined 57.5 pounds, or 12.14 percent of their total body weight. Tom took this year's challenge to heart, literally, and established new eating habits as well as a daily exercise routine. Their success earned team One X-2M a \$500 cash prize, as well as a desire to maintain a healthier routine.

"I knew I needed to do something and the health challenge was just a way to challenge myself to get motivated," Tom said. "I just hope the lifestyle change can stick."

Therein lies the real challenge!

From a planning perspective, organizers are always trying to find new and creative ways to keep people motivated in their efforts to shed pounds and/or live a healthier lifestyle. One of the new twists this year involved an online resource which we think has tremendous potential to raise the bar in future years.

Dane Sutherland, co-owner of the Aurora Fitness Center with his wife, Sara, works for a large health company in Kansas City. Through Dane's efforts, Cerner Corporation allowed Hamilton County Health Challenge participants to utilize a rather sophisticated online program as a way to track progress and communicate along the way.

Not everyone in the challenge logged on to the portal, but some interesting facts and figures emerged based on the experience of those who did. For the 114 competitors who used the website and officially weighed out, a total of 634 pounds were lost -- 113 more pounds than the challenge field.

Having a way to track your progress (as well as that of your competitors), share tips and have some fun throughout the process increases your level of engagement. That's a formula for success sponsors and organizers have been looking for from the beginning.

Thanks again to all who stepped to the plate this year.

Kurt Johnson