

# STORIES OF HOPE

## Happiness is Being Active & Helping Others



Leticia Olivarez

Being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 10 years ago changed Leticia Olivarez' life. Today, life is so much better.

Olivarez, 44, from Austin, Texas, tamed her diabetes through diet and exercise. She shed more than 40 pounds, added muscle, dramatically decreased her medication, and lowered her average blood glucose to the recommended range. Along the way, she also found purpose in helping other people get active to manage diabetes and other health problems.

"Helping others feeds my soul," Olivarez says. She is healthy and happy "being active, helping others and being part of the community while helping myself feel better inside."

In 2001, Olivarez was sedentary and stressed, overweight and overworked. She responded to the diagnosis with denial, despite having lost family members to diabetic complications. She eventually tired of "feeling bad."

"I wanted more balance in my life, and I needed to make a lifestyle change," Olivarez recalls. She started eating better and discovered an appetite for exercise when introduced to Pilates, a conditioning method to build strength and flexibility.

"Exercise made me feel better," Olivarez says. "I began to feel stronger, healthier and more confident." She sampled exercise options – swimming,

yoga, running, kickboxing, weight training, cycling, golf – and set a yearly fitness goal, like entering a 5-kilometer run every month.

In 2007, Olivarez became a certified Pilates instructor and soon was helping female cancer survivors prepare for a triathlon in a 12-week training program. She achieved her 2008 goal, earning the title of triathlete, by joining the women in two triathlons, which required a 1/2-mile swim in open water, a 12-mile bike ride and a 3.1-mile run.

"The feeling of this accomplishment is amazing," she says. Since shifting her focus to cycling the past few years, Olivarez has pedaled up to 150 miles in two-day rides. She raised \$1,500 for the American Diabetes Association in the 2010 South Central Texas Tour de Cure® and this year was the event's Bike Shop & Recruitment Chair.

In another move toward more balance in her life, Olivarez recently swapped a stressful career in the computer industry for an 8-to-5 job in state government's Family and Community Health Services Division. In her spare time she inspires people with diabetes and other conditions to get active through Pilates, cycling or triathlons.

Earlier this year, a woman with type 1 diabetes approached Olivarez at a bike shop with questions about the Tour de Cure. The woman signed up after a dose of Olivarez' enthusiasm and encouragement.

"She just had her first training ride and is feeling good," Olivarez says. "I got somebody moving, and that is the best feeling ever." ▲

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