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## Winners will lose the most

By **Jonathan L'Ecuyer**  
Staff Writer

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Chambers of commerce in Mississippi and North Carolina heard about the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce "Biggest Loser in Haverhill" competition from a national chamber publication, and have contacted Haverhill in hopes of mirroring the program.

Started in January to coincide with New Year's resolutions, the Haverhill competition will have its second weigh-in at the Merrimack Valley Hospital tomorrow.

If the first weigh-in early last month is any indication, the contest will be a close battle all the way. At the weigh-in, two teams were tied for first place, and the top five were separated by only .4 percent. All 17 teams registered some type of loss.

Current standings put the first of three Merrimack Valley Hospital teams, along with the Trinity EMS, Inc. team, in the lead with a 3.3-percent loss. Career Resources' second team is in second place with a 3.25 percent loss. Home Health VNA has registered a 3.1 percent loss, and Whittier Health Network follows with 2.9 percent.

The competition was inspired by the hit NBC reality show "The Biggest Loser," which gathers overweight contestants from across the country and has them face various temptations while being provided with approved weight loss skills and resources to help them transform their bodies, health and, ultimately, their lives.

In Haverhill, 17 teams with more than 100 players are vying for the title, but only one will win the inaugural weight loss competition and walk away with \$1,000 in May.

"Trinity (EMS, Inc.) along with the Health Committee of the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce floated around ideas late last year of ways to educate the community about

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health care issues while making it fun," said John Chemaly, co-chair of the Health Committee and Trinity team captain. "We never thought the response would be as great as it was."

The monetary prize serves as great inspiration, but the true incentives, participants say, are healthier lifestyles, feeling better about themselves, and not letting teammates down.

"We meet every week and offer support to each other throughout the day," said Laurie Faust of the Whittier Health Network team, whose members often do Pilates during lunch and exercise together after work. "A lot of people expressed that they don't want to let the team down. It's a lifestyle change for a lot of us, but we're close-knit and communicate with each other about slip-ups. It's a nice support group."

Faust, who stepped up her trips to the gym to lose a few pounds and increase endurance and strength before her May wedding, explained that in the past several members of her team had individually tried to lose weight, and nothing seemed to work. But their united effort and the support that accompanies a team mentality has made the difference.

"We had all tried everything before, so we said, 'Let's come together as a team and try to do it,'" Faust said.

Gregg Perry, the captain of Merrimack Valley Hospital's current first-place team, said the competition there is at a whole new level — all three hospital teams eat "Biggest Loser meals" prepared daily by Sue Plaistad, the hospital director of food services.

"(Sue) is our nutritionist and physical trainer as well; she took some people to the YMCA to sign up for two-week memberships and she isn't even on (one of the hospital's teams)," Perry said. "She just went beyond the call of duty and is doing a really great job for us."

Like Faust, Perry said his team's success is in its internal support network.

"We have each other's phone numbers. If someone is having a weak moment, they will call someone (for help)," he said. "The key is that we don't want to let the hospital, and the team, down."

Chemaly said the effort it takes to work out pales in comparison to the effort it takes for him to resist a hamburger.

"I'm working out on a regular basis. The difficult part (for me) is not eating, because I love to eat," he said. "I'm a junk food addict. I can always pass up cookies and cake, but not a hamburger."

The team that loses the highest percentage of its combined weight will be announced during the annual Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce dinner in May.

[schools create leaders'?](#)