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*As 4th Pediatric Cancer Awareness Walk nears, the story of 'Baby Shawn' and the inspiration he has given others to fight to defeat DIPG remains powerful.*

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(Cont. on pg. 3)

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## Changing Our Vision of Local Government

By: **Robert M. Restaino**  
 Candidate for Mayor of NF

Establishing effectiveness and efficiency in local government is an extremely

(Cont. on pg. 6)

## NF International Film Festival Rolls Out Red Carpet Sept. 26-29 for Filmmakers & Local Film Fans

(Cont. on pg. 2)

## Robert M. Restaino

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# NIAGARA FALLS

## NF International Film Festival Rolls Out Red Carpet Sept. 26-29 for Filmmakers & Local Film Fans from Cover

### John Wildman

The Niagara Falls International Film Festival will make its debut on Wednesday, September 26 at The Rapids Theatre (1711 Main Street) with a red carpet gala celebrating 2-time Academy Award-winning Costume Designer Mark Bridges (*THE ARTIST*, *PHANTOM THREAD*) and Oscar-winning Visual Effects Artist Craig Barron (*THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON*). The event will include the presentation of The Key to the City and a star on the planned Niagara Falls Walk of Fame to native son, Bridges, by mayor, Paul Dyster. The evening will also include the presentation of NFIFF's first Legacy Award to Barron.

The film festival is an outgrowth of the Buffalo-Niagara Film Festival, which was staple on the local film scene for the past 15 years. NFIFF hopes to take that original vision and grow to deliver a bigger, better, and stronger film experience for Western New York. The four-day film festival will include a total of 11 feature-length films and 33 short films.

Closing with Matthew J. Weiss's documentary *MAN IN RED BANDANA* about 9/11 hero Welles Remy Crowther at the Riviera Theatre (67 Webster Street) on Saturday, September 29, will be a Special Tribute to Crowther's family with a portion of the proceeds from the event going to charities benefitting Firefighters and First Responders.

Niagara Falls International Film Festival's Founder and President Bill Cowell said, "It's exciting to bring the best of Hollywood – in the person of our two Academy Award-winning film artist guests - to preside over a wonderful four-day schedule of films, panels, parties, and events that will bring outstanding independent films from around the country and the world, together with the best work that local filmmakers have created over the past year. The schedule is jam-packed for film lovers that are hungry for more than they can routinely get at the multiplex."

Highlights among the film lineup will include the East Coast premiere of Melora Walters's drama, *WATERLILY JAGUAR*, starring Mira Sorvino and James Le Gros. Walters, making her feature film writing and directing debut, is best known for her appearances onscreen in Paul Thomas Anderson's classic films, *BOOGIE NIGHTS* and *MAGNOLIA*. Justin Foia's *DOE* is another highlight - a thriller about a man who wakes up not knowing who he is, but with the ability to speak dozens of languages. Now he must race against time to discover his true identity. Walters, Jonathan Piumelli, producer of both *WATERLILY JAGUAR* and *DOE*, and cast members from both films are set to attend and participate in post-screening Q&As.

NFIFF emphasizes the international aspect of the fest with films from Argentina, Cuba, and Spain, including; Javier Zavallos and Francisco D' Eufemia's Argentinian film *ESCAPE FROM PATAGONIA*, a gaucho-west-



A photo from the 2018 Film Festival in Niagara Falls honoring Academy Award Winners Mark Bridges (left) and Craig Barron (right).

ern based on the life of Argentinian pioneer Francisco P. Moreno; Arturo Sotto Diaz's Cuban thriller *MANTI'S NEST*, about a young woman with limited time to convince the authorities she didn't commit a murder; and the recently added *THE NETWORK OF FREEDOM*. Directed by Pablo Moreno, the Spanish produced film stars internationally acclaimed actress Assumpta Serna as Helena Studler, a French nun from the Daughters of Charity, who sheltered and saved the lives of hundreds of orphaned children

from the Nazis during World War II.

NFIFF will also include free-to-the-public short film programs, as well as filmmaker panels and seminars with top industry pros like Stanley Isaacs (Director, *SOMETIMES LUCKY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SMART: CONVERSATIONS WITH MACE NEUFELD*), Alyn Darnay (Director, *SHADOW FIGHTER*), and Piumelli. Passes and tickets to the Niagara Falls International Film Festival can be found at <http://nfiff.com>.

## NIAGARA



## REPORTER

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# 4th Annual Pediatric Cancer Awareness Event

Nicholas D. D'Angelo

## Remembering Baby Shawn's Story

Can you imagine what it would feel like to hear from a doctor that your child has cancer? What about hearing that not only does your child have cancer, but that he/she has only six – twelve months to live?

As hard as it is to think about, that's the feeling parents of children with DIPG (Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glimoma) are faced with when their children are diagnosed. It's what Nicole Vathy felt when her four-year-old son Shawn was diagnosed in August of 2015.

DIPG is a devastating pediatric brain tumor that occurs on the pons of the brainstem, which is the oldest and most primitive part of the brain. The brainstem is also known as the 'stem of life' because its job is to make the body survive. Some examples of brainstem functions include controlling breathing, heart rate, swallowing, motor control, and consciousness.

Unlike other cancers, DIPG cannot be removed and the effects of radiation therapy only temporarily alleviate symptoms. There is no cure and the median survival period after diagnosis is nine months. Only 1% of children live beyond two years after diagnosis and less than half of one percent live beyond three years. Overall, the survival rate is 0%.

DIPG does more than take the lives of children; it tortures them. Children become paralyzed, lose all motor function, lose the ability to swallow, to speak and even to see; all the while remaining completely aware. As one pediatric cancer researcher noted, "you can hear the agony through their eyes."

The problem is pediatric cancer research is terribly underfunded. In fact, it is the least funded type of cancer research.

Shawn, who has garnered the nickname "Baby Shawn" over the past several years, just passed the three year mark after he was diagnosed with DIPG on August 15th, 2015. Little did Shawn or Nicole know that his diagnosis, energy, and infectious joy would evolve into a movement for increasing awareness for pediatric cancer in Western New York. Nor did they know Mike Esposito, current teacher at Niagara Falls High School and well-known basketball coach, who would become part of their family.

If you ask Baby Shawn though, it really all started with the Golden State Warriors and Steph Curry.

"I was reading a pamphlet of bible verses and the first line in it was, 'you have the power to change someone's world today,'" said Esposito. "Coincidentally or not, it was later that day I learned about Shawn, his diagnosis with DIPG, that it was terminal, and how his idol was Steph Curry of the Warriors."

"I immediately sent an email to Steve Kerr, Golden State's head coach, and told him that there's this kid, he's terminal, his idol is Steph

Curry, and is there any way you could set up a meeting with Curry? He literally emailed me back in an hour – it could have been less than that – saying yes, of course, no problem, we'll take care of it."

As it turns out, the trip did happen; but nothing like they expected.

"We're in the pool at the hotel which, luckily, was only about a ten minute walk from the arena," said Esposito, "when we got a call from the PR guy saying that Steph wanted to meet with Shawn before the game. So we raced out of the pool, over to the arena, and onto the court where Shawn was able to watch Steph take shooting practice. Afterwards he called us over into the locker room area, took his shoes off, signed them, and gave them to Shawn."

Altogether, Steph spent about an hour before the game, as well as an hour and a half after the game, with Shawn.

"It was so cute how he had done it," said Nicole. "Steph took both Shawn and his brother into the locker room. At one point we were outside talking with Steve Kerr and out of the locker room comes Steph, Shawn, and Mikai saying that they're trying to find Klay [Thompson]."

"After the game we went back down onto the court and Shawn went into the locker room," said Esposito. "After a little while Nicole told me to go in and check on them so I went in and found Steph, Draymond [Green], Shawn, and Mikai laughing and eating dinner."

The trip is evidence of how true the bible verse Esposito had read was. He did, in fact, have the power to change someone's life; and he did.

But that was only the beginning.

Esposito organized the first Pediatric Cancer Awareness Walk in 2016, which has become a staple since then. The walk raised \$6,800 in 2016, \$7,500 in 2017, \$20,000 in 2018, and hoping for another successful year in 2019..

All of the funds raised go to two organizations that devote all of their resources to pediatric cancer research: PUNT, which was started by former Buffalo Bills Punter Brian Moorman and Go4TheGoal.

A key difference between PUNT / Go4TheGoal and other cancer research organizations such as the American Cancer Society ("ACS") is that a very small percentage of money donated goes toward administrative fees, whereas 40-45% of the funds raised for the ACS goes towards salaries and other overhead costs.

Pediatric cancer only gets 4% of all cancer funding by the federal government, and that's for all types of pediatric cancer not just DIPG. In fact, DIPG gets less than half of one percent. The same treatment that was used on children in the 1970's is still being used today in 2018.

Esposito even went so far as trying to convince the NFL to 'Go Gold' for a weekend to raise awareness for

pediatric cancer research.

"We got 7,000 letters from all over Western New York asking Roger Goodell for the NFL to go gold for one week during the NFL season," said Esposito. "We actually met Roger Goodell in NYC and although we didn't get a weekend specifically for pediatric cancer, I think Shawn and the letters made a difference because the NFL now does something called 'A Crucial Catch' where they raise awareness for a variety of cancers including pediatric cancer."

Baby Shawn's story is so much more than just being someone to beat the odds. It's of bringing people together.

"I don't think people understand how important it is to get involved and support pediatric cancer research," said Vathy, "and the biggest reason for that is we aren't made aware of pediatric cancer, DIPG in particular, like we are breast cancer. My seven-year-old knows to wear pink during a football game in October. It needs that kind of recognition."

Through all of his trips to the hospital, two stem biopsies, over thirty rounds of radiation, countless MRI's and never-ending bloodwork, "he's never cried. He's never complained," said Vathy. "His strength is infectious. It makes you never want to give up."

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This year's event will be held on Saturday, September 21st, 2019, at the Oasis Pavillion at Hyde Park in Niagara Falls. Enjoy multiple bands and food for sale from local small businesses in their food trucks as we celebrate 'Baby Shawn' and his heart-warming story.

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# THE CRIME

## WEEKLY HEADLINES

-Kyle Cummings, who was sentenced in 2003 to six years to life in prison for the death of Jennifer Bolender is set to be released from prison between now and October 10th.



-Niagara Falls Police responded to Cleveland Avenue in the afternoon hours of Thursday, September 12th, 2019, after reports of a domestic altercation possibly involving a weapon. According to police, one person was detained.

-Niagara Falls Police, in a joint effort with the ATF, FBI, Border Patrol and State Police, executed two search warrants in the afternoon hours of Thursday, September 12th, 2019, at two houses on the 1000 block of 19th Street. According to reports, drugs and firearms were seized.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the 400 block of 19th Street in the evening hours of Friday, September 13th, 2019, after reports of shots fired. According to reports, one shotgun shell casing was found in addition to a long-gun. One person was detained and no injuries were reported.

-Niagara Falls Police responded to the Denny's on Niagara Falls Boulevard in the early morning hours of Sunday, September 15th, 2019, after reports that a family had left without paying their bill. hours of A family that dines together, dashes together.

Niagara Falls police responding to the Denny's on the Blvd for reports a family of 7 that didn't pay their \$100 dollar bill.

-New York State Police and Niagara Falls Fire responded to the Niagara Gorge in the evening hours of Sunday, September 15th, 2019, after reports of a dead body in the water. The identity of the body has not been released at the time of this publication.



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## NF Between a Rock and Hard Place on Budget Gap

**Tony Farina**

It may not be enough to bail out the city even if it wins the approval of the Niagara Falls City Council, which is still very much in doubt. But after years of inaction on the sort of tough political decisions that were needed then and are needed now, city lawmakers and the administration of outgoing Mayor Paul Dyster are between a rock and a hard place and will take another crack at a garbage user fee to fill a gaping \$5.5 million hole in next year's budget.

Dyster is preparing to propose a \$234.75 garbage user fee to raise an estimated \$4 million toward that budget shortfall and lawmakers will discuss the mayor's plan at this week's regular council session on Wednesday before possibly scheduling a vote the following week.

Council Chairman Andrew Touma concedes enacting a user fee will be a tough sell to lawmakers and residents, with three yes votes needed from among the five city lawmakers to even hold a public hearing.

The proposed user fee would be about \$19 per month per household with two votes, according to Touma, with a final vote needed before Oct. 1 when the mayor's budget, with or without the user fee, will be due to be received by the council.

Touma, a cool-headed lawmaker, realizes the city's failure to take serious cost-cutting and revenue-increasing actions in past years helped lead to the current crisis. He says it is now time for elected officials to do their jobs, admitting it won't be easy with an election looming in November and high-paid city unions representing a major voting bloc who would most certainly scream to high heaven about job cuts and contract adjustments, possibly in the form of a control board if the city continues to sink into the red.

But the unions could be facing a catch 22 because if there's no user fee to raise \$4 million, heads will likely roll accompanied by a major tax increase that will make nobody happy, especially those losing their jobs and paying more taxes.

Touma says to make matters worse, increased health care costs of about \$1 million and extra pay of \$1.5 million for city employee salaries in the coming year, 28 weeks instead of 27, only makes the budget noose a little tighter.

We should also recognize there is no settlement in sight in the stalemate with the Senecas over revenue sharing, meaning that problem could get even worse before it gets better, if it ever does.

"We've cut jobs through attrition,"

says Touma, "and we've been able to hold the expense increases to an average of 2.65 percent a year over the last 10 years while holding tax increases to .017 per cent on average over the same period."

But while that is commendable, the Dyster administration and the city used about \$9 million a year in casino cash and an average of \$2.9 million in fund balance between 2014 through 2017 to balance budgets, draining the city's reserves. Tough measures, like enacting a user garbage fee that is used in many similar-sized municipalities and reworking work schedules of public employees to reduce costs, were not taken on.

Touma said the city is hoping to reduce casino money transfers to the budget if and when the Senecas resume payments, the idea being to find a way to balance the budget without the casino money, leaving it for the economic development that it was intended to be used for under the 2002 gaming compact that is now stalled in federal courts as the Senecas refuse to honor the arbitration panel's award.

"We have some tough decisions, for sure," said Touma, which includes the possibility of layoffs that could translate into reduced services to taxpayers across a broad scale, including public safety and infrastructure. Without the user fee-- a smaller version of which was rejected by lawmakers last year in favor of a tax increase --an even larger tax hike could be looming for 2020.

Chris Voccio, one of two Republican lawmakers making up the five-member council, says he's against enacting a user fee or raising taxes, insisting it is time for public employees to come to the table and help save the city.

"We need to cut expenses," says Voccio. "We have to make tough decisions and maybe layoffs are what we need to do."

The other Republican city lawmaker, Ken Tompkins, who is running for re-election, has said he wants to see if the mayor has cut everything he could possibly cut before looking at a garbage user fee.

Touma says he is uncertain where it will all end up but one thing for sure, no matter the course, there will be pain enough to go around, with or without a garbage user fee.

The city's current fiscal quagmire will not be easily fixed, and whoever wins the mayoral election in November will be taking the reins of a badly broken city that needs a cooperative effort from all interested parties to repair the years of inaction by lawmakers and leaders afraid to make the tough decisions. There is no way out now, and the rubber has indeed hit the road for Niagara Falls.



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# Changing Our Vision of Local Government Cont. from Cover

challenging task for any mayor. Many barriers arise that prevent the simple implementation of the policies and programs the mayor desires. One of the most difficult challenges for any mayor is convincing the city council that a particular policy or program will produce the anticipated outcomes. That will certainly be true for my concept of collaborative government.

Speeches, pronouncements, and even articles on the Opinions Page are one thing and official action on the part of a mayor is something else. While during their campaigns political candidates for mayor have tended to promise change, it is a fairly accurate observation to say that the administrations of most mayors are marked more by continuity than change.

A mayor must not project uncertainty as to the direction he wants to pursue once he takes office, but must be realistic as to how quickly he can launch the city on this journey. The mayor must understand the resistance he may face from the city council and career civil servants as he attempts to implement the policies and programs of a new administration. With regard to any perceived “stonewalling” from within the government, the mayor must effectively communicate his resolve to be the one who establishes the direction that will be taken.

There will be plenty of opportunities for people to observe and criticize the divide between the proposed policies and programs of the new administration and the actions

taken by the mayor to achieve them. Clarity on the part of the mayor is the essential ingredient in dissolving resistance to his leadership. The old cliché of “say what you mean and mean what you say” is most appropriate in this regard. People who know me are well aware that I hold true to this concept.

I fully understand that my platform of collaborative government runs counter to the instincts of the typical candidate for local government. I believe that enlisting the support of the first-ring suburbs of Niagara Falls into an alliance of local governments dedicated to the development of the most cost-effective ways to deliver basic municipal services is the key to a more efficient system of governance. The typical “go-it-alone” style of governing must be seen for the failures it has caused. Collaboration with, not competition against, these suburban governments will be the hallmark of the Restaino administration. I know that governmental effectiveness cannot occur simply because the mayor orders it to happen. For collaborative government to be accepted, I will have to demonstrate that there are real cost-efficiencies to be enjoyed equally by all municipalities participating in the process.

As I previously mentioned in an article published in July, the delivery of general governmental services (e.g. purchasing, information technology, code enforcement, records management, etc.) expends over 8 percent of the 2019 budget for the City of Niagara Falls. I



Niagara Falls Mayoral Candidate Robert M. Restaino.

am convinced that a collaborative approach to the delivery of governmental services by a larger group of municipalities could actually result in a permanent cost reduction of about \$5 million for our city. Savings for the other municipalities would be proportionate to the average annual expenditures dedicated to such similar services in their communities.

Planning, economic development, and tourism promotion are three other areas that can realize cost savings through a collaborative approach to the delivery of these municipal services. Extending the stay of the typical tourist family is something that cannot be accomplished exclusively within the boundaries of Niagara Falls. Instead, the promotion of water-related tourism should involve input from every Niagara County community that borders on the Niagara River and Lake Ontario. The future expansion of the Discover Niagara Shuttle into central Niagara County is just one example of the effectiveness of the collaborative approach to governance.

The delivery of basic sanitation services throughout the western portion of Niagara County is another

area where cost-efficiencies can be achieved. If Niagara Falls and its first-ring suburbs were to form a collaborative alliance in order to negotiate with waste disposal firms for the lowest cost for this service, what could be the potential annual savings for each community? How would waste disposal companies react when faced with a Request for Proposals offered by a consortium of at least four neighboring municipalities?

Please permit me the opportunity to state the obvious. In its 2019 city budget, deducting the transfer of approximately \$10.4 million of casino revenue and \$1.9 million of revenue from the Tourism Fund, the current administration proposes to spend almost \$91.3 million for operating expenses and then off-setting this with only \$79 million in recurring revenue. From what source will this administration secure \$12.3 million in order to “balance” the budget for fiscal year 2020? This is not an issue that a “go-it-alone” mayor can effectively solve. It’s time to stop repeating the same mistakes; it’s time to commit to new thinking in government. That’s real change and not more of the same.



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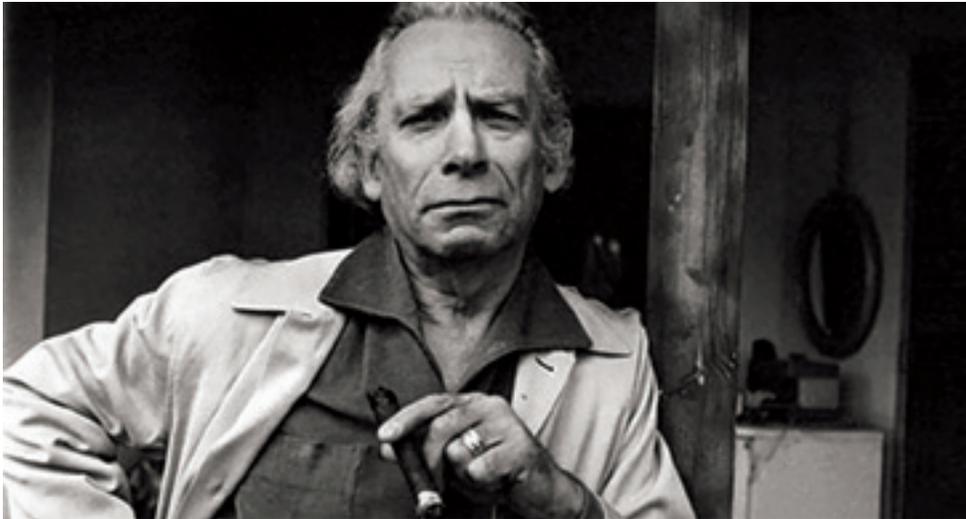
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# Niagara Falls International Film Festival Salutes Film Maverick Samuel Fuller

*Legendary filmmaker's wife, daughter, and stars from his films to attend festival.*



## John Wildman

The Niagara Falls International Film Festival (NFIFF), which opens next week on Wednesday, September 13, will introduce a new award this year, the Icon of Industry Award. The honor will be part of a festival-long salute to the career of Hollywood maverick, Samuel Fuller. The presentation of the award, as well as a star on the Niagara Falls Walk of Fame will be made to Christa and Samantha Fuller, the filmmaker's wife and daughter.

NFIFF will screen Samantha Fuller's documentary about her father, *A FULLER LIFE* (2013), as well as presenting a number of Fuller's films. Among the classics, include; *CHINA GATE* (1957); *HELL AND HIGH WATER* (1954); *THE NAKED KISS* (1964); *POWER OF THE PRESS* (story by Fuller) (1943); *SHOCK CORRIDOR* (1963); *THE STEEL HELMET* (1951); and *THE BIG RED ONE* (1980) which screens as part of the Niagara Falls International Film Festival's Closing Night Gala. Filmmaker and film historian Michael Schlesinger will also be on hand to add to the backstories and history of the films.

The Criterion Collection described Samuel Fuller as an "singularly audacious B-movie visionary (who) made purposefully crude, elegantly stripped-down films that laid bare the dark side of American culture". Fuller will be the first person to be honored with NFIFF's Icon of the Industry Award, which is

dedicated to honoring those who are no longer with us but whose body of work have made lasting impressions in the industry and who have influenced countless generations of filmmakers. In addition to presenting a retrospective of their work/films, each honoree will have a donation made in their honor to the Motion Picture & Television Country House and Hospital.

Niagara Falls International Film Festival's Founder and President Bill Cowell said, "It's always thrilling to both grow the film festival with more screenings and more filmmaker appearances for the local film fans to enjoy. But combining a salute to one of the greats of cinema like Samuel Fuller including his wife and daughter and some of the wonderful stars he worked with, along with the best in independent film is going to add up to an incredible week for the city and the people here that truly love movies."

Those stars will include Robert Carradine, Perry Lang, Kelly Ward, and Bobby Di Ciccio, all of whom appeared in *THE BIG RED ONE*. The film starred Lee Marvin as a hardened sergeant with the four core members of his infantry unit, who try to survive World War II as they move from battle to battle throughout Europe. The film screens Saturday, September 21 at 4:45PM at Regal Cinemas Hollywood 12 (720 Builders Way, Niagara Falls, NY 14304). Passes and tickets to the Niagara Falls International Film Festival can be found at <http://nfiiff.com>.



## Your Health Is More Than a Number on a Scale

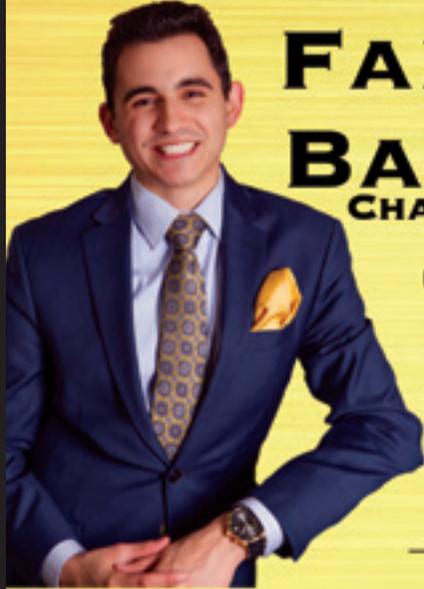
For people looking to improve their health, losing weight is usually pretty high on the priority list. The most proven way to achieve that goal is combining a healthier diet with physical activity several times a week. But it is important to remember that a healthy weight isn't the only measure of a healthy person. Exercise leads to many physical and mental health benefits that can't be seen on any scale.

Here are just some of the hidden benefits of regular exercise:

1. Lower stress levels. Exercise floods the brain with mood-boosting chemicals like dopamine and norepinephrine. The chemicals are so good at improving our mood that exercise is often recommended as a treatment for depression and anxiety.
2. Improved cardiovascular health. Regular weekly exercise lessens your chances for heart disease and stroke and also lowers blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Your resting heart rate also decreases, lowering the strain on your heart.
3. Less chronic pain. Just 15 minutes of high-intensity exercise floods the body with endorphins – chemicals that block pain receptors in your nervous system and also help reduce inflammation and swelling. This is the same way that opioids like morphine and oxycodone relieve pain, but endorphins don't put you at risk for opioid addiction.
4. Better sleep. Studies show that getting 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous activity every week results in improved sleep quality in the form of longer, more restful sleep.
5. Improved brain function. Working out strengthens the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning, helping you stay sharp as you age and enhancing cognitive abilities tied to problem solving and multitasking.
6. Lower cancer risk. People who are more active are less likely to get up to 13 different types of cancer, including cancers of the colon, liver, esophagus, lung and breast.
7. Stronger immune system. Exercise increases the production of antibodies that help the body ward off infection from harmful viruses and bacteria. Evidence suggests regular exercise cuts your chances of getting sick in half and helps you get over colds twice as fast.
8. Improved bone density. Both cardio and strength training stimulate bone growth and help us fight osteoporosis as we age.

Remember that combining a balanced, healthy diet with regular exercise results in a huge number of real health benefits that no scale can show.

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