

Vicksburg woman a finalist for CNN Hero award

The Clarion-Ledger • September 24, 2010

Linda Fondren of Vicksburg, founder of the **Shape Up Vicksburg** campaign, has been selected by a Blue Ribbon Panel as one of 10 finalists for the **CNN Hero of the Year Award**.

Fondren, whose Shape Up Vicksburg campaign has resulted in a collective weight loss of more than 15,000 pounds among participants during the past year, was chosen from more than 10,000 nominations submitted by viewers in 100 countries.

The Blue Ribbon Panel comprised of luminaries recognized for their dedication to public service and included humanitarians, activists and philanthropists such as Muhammad Ali, Sir Richard Branson and Yo-Yo Ma.

Each finalist receives a \$25,000 award for his or her efforts. Each of this year's top 10 CNN Heroes will be honored at "CNN Heroes: An All-Star Tribute," airing at 7 p.m. Nov. 25 from the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. The global broadcast, with CNN's Anderson Cooper as the host, will culminate with the announcement of the CNN Hero of the Year, selected by the public in an **online poll**.

Those interested can go to **CNNHeroes.com** to participate in the poll, which continues through 5 a. m. Nov. 18. The individual receiving the most votes will receive an additional \$100,000.

Fondren would use the money, as well as her finalist award, to continue and expand her efforts to help transform Mississippi from the fattest to the fittest in the nation.

"I feel like someone is paying attention, and I am deeply grateful and extremely honored to be a CNN Hero of the Year Top Ten honoree," Fondren said. "When I started Shape Up Vicksburg, I was just looking to bring about meaningful change from the fact that Mississippi has been voted the 'fattest' state in the country for six consecutive years. Having a sister whose life was cut short by cancer and whose obesity restricted her from living a healthy life, I am well aware of the deadly consequences of being overweight and obese and all the related health problems, from diabetes to heart disease."

Fondren developed Shape Up Vicksburg into a multifaceted nonprofit movement that includes free fitness and exercise classes at her Shape Up Sisters fitness center and at local community centers.

There are also health screenings organized by River Region Health System, monthly communitywide walk-runs, nutrition workshops, healthy grocery shopping classes and programs for teachers and parents to serve as role models in providing healthy lifestyles for children. There are also comprehensive measurement tools to track participants' progress.

Two-thirds of Vicksburg's adults and children are overweight or obese, and an estimated 70 percent of the city's diabetes risk is attributed to excess weight. In addition, one of every three Mississippians is obese or overweight, and the state has high rates of diabetes, heart disease and related illnesses.

"While I'm proud of the tremendous weight loss numbers we've already achieved, it is important to note that weight loss alone won't solve these problems," Fondren stressed. "In fact, there are lots of diets out there that just focus on weight loss. Shape Up Vicksburg is more than a weight-loss challenge. It is a life transformation challenge."

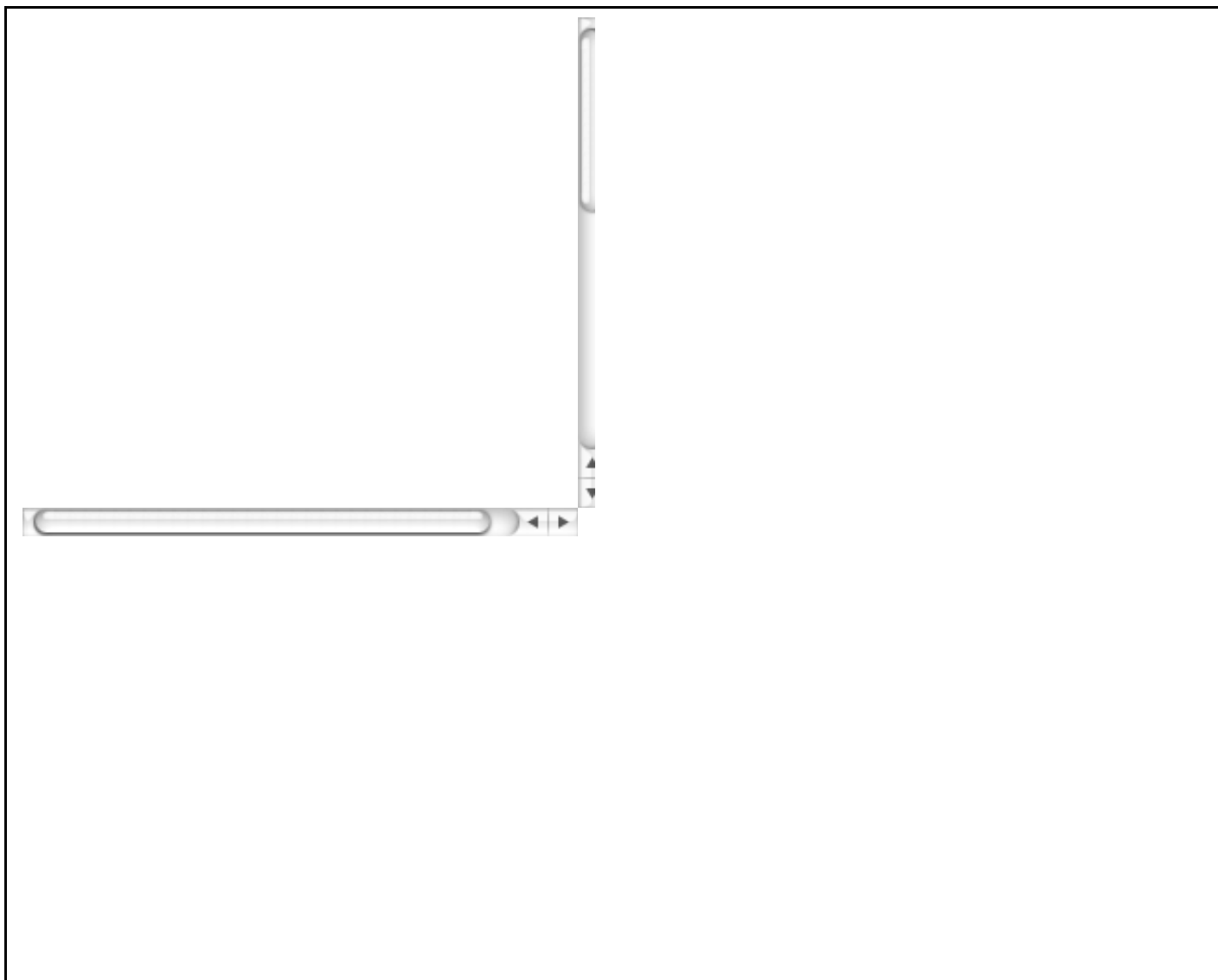
For more information and to enroll, visit **www.shapeupvicksburg.com** or call 1-866-774-2738 or (601) 619-7277.



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