



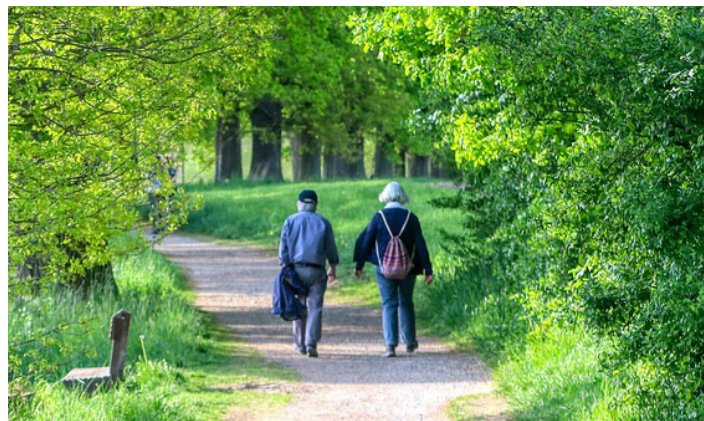
# A Lot More Than Just Walking...

By Abigail Wiebenson

**I**t's been my good fortune to be part of a DCV walking group since the first one was created in the early days — maybe 2009 — by **Judy duBerrier**. These days I regularly join two: the Tu/Th group on Tuesdays and the M/W/F group on Fridays. They are quite different in some respects and similar in others. The first group, about 8 or so if everyone shows up — rare — meets at 8 am at Kalorama Park at the corner of Columbia and Kalorama Roads. We walk for an hour in various neighborhoods on both sides of Connecticut Avenue, with a route decided each time we meet. We enjoy seeing how the extensive community gardens are evolving and what's going on in the embassy area, Malcolm X Park and beyond, occasionally down as far as Dupont Circle. Many of the members of this group have circumstances that allow us to walk for only an hour. The early start time enables us to manage our schedules more easily.

The M/W/F group is made up of about 10 die-hard, more-than-an-hour walkers. Meeting at 8:30 in front of the fountain at Dupont Circle, the group often heads quite far afield: the Kennedy Center, Georgetown, upper and lower Connecticut Avenue, Mt Pleasant, Howard University, Capitol Hill and, on occasion, Roosevelt Island. It should be noted that not all walkers last the entire time; it's quite acceptable to peel off and head home when needed. One requirement is an appealing place to stop for coffee and food; pausing to eat together is built into this group's routine. Recently, we've been landing at Tazza by the Kennedy Center to support their business, given the imperiled future of the Center. We celebrate birthdays with delicious meals to which everyone contributes. The solidity of this group has resulted in some members traveling to far-off lands together. Repeatedly. Constantly.

What's similar about both groups is the nature of the conversations. From suggestions about cultural events and mini reviews, to ideas and opinions about books and movies, resources for health concerns, getaways, and home maintenance, both groups are a treasure trove of information. Walking group members — in various configurations — go to happy hours, dinners, concerts, museums, galleries and movies together. Both groups also look out for one another, offering rides, companionship and meals when friends are dealing with stuff. Both have listservs so we know who's showing up or not; if we haven't heard from someone in a while, we check to make sure that all is well. While both groups have male participants, they are decidedly made up of a majority of



women. It's curious that more guys don't seem to consider walking a bona fide form of exercise and friendship building.

Each and every individual in these groups feels decidedly grateful for how being a participant enriches their life — deepening awareness and connectedness. Socially, physically, cognitively and emotionally, all those contacted about this article noted how they benefit from our walking groups in multiple ways. One said, "If left to my own devices I would sit 24 hours a day and read, play games on my phone and watch TV to name a few "mindless" activities. Walking keeps me much healthier. Being out with the group, or just doing other things with group members on our own helps with loneliness now that I live alone." Another stated, "It remains a touchstone for me, especially as I recover from surgery. I only will get to check the back-to-normal box once I am walking at least weekly again. What I value most are the exercise, the friendships I've made and the camaraderie among the group."

Still another commented, "I really like walking with other people rather than alone. The nature of my life is that it can be hard to plan ahead and make commitments for a given morning to walk with someone. The walking group gives me the option to have a group to walk with when the opportunity arises, and I don't feel like I'm letting someone down when I have to miss a day because some issue has come up at home preventing me from getting out at the appointed time."

Now that the weather is more hospitable, consider joining us. The welcome mat is ever out.