

Are you happy?

Two women walk through city asking what matters

BY CAIN MADDEN
MANAGING EDITOR

cain.madden@tidewaternews.com

FRANKLIN

When people in Franklin think about happiness, Henry Scott of the Franklin Signature Youth Program said, it's often conveyed into material things, such as a car, or higher income, or even laughing at a joke.

"On the really basic subject of happiness, it's almost like people really don't even understand what it is," the Franklin native said. "We all seek happiness, but we treat it like it's a quick sense of joy."

That's why, when Scott heard about a pair of Vermont women walking through Western Tidewa-

ter on a walking tour promoting happiness awareness, he had to meet them.

"I feel that the scholars of the world — the decisions they make — can't be made correctly without traveling the world and getting the perspective of the people," Scott said. "And what they are doing is different. They're narrowing down a synopsis of what happiness is in the U.S."

About six years ago, Paula Francis and Linda Wheatley started Gross National Happiness USA. The idea behind the non-profit organization was that happiness and well-being of the population ought to be used as a measure in national policy, as it is just as important as the economic growth indicators

"Knowing what matters to people, what makes them happy, is essential to good policy making," Wheatley said.

"It is one of the critical conversations of our time," Francis added. "We are getting a sense that people really want to talk about these things."

Two years ago, the idea came to the women to walk around the country and talk about happiness and the things that really matter in life to people. At that time, they walked from Vermont to Washington, D.C., talking to hundreds of people a day, traveling at a 15-20 mile per day clip.

"We found it so powerful," Wheatley said. "People were so nice, and it was so reassuring. We decided we wanted to walk full time."

This year, they started in Montreal and had worked their way down to Franklin by November. Francis and Wheatley are on their way South, where they will start heading West, making sure to make stops in New Orleans and Santa Fe, New Mexico, on their way to Santa Monica, California. From there, they will head north to Seattle.

And if it's worth it, we'll keep going," Francis said.

Along the way, they want to see a diversity of communities, not just places where they want to vacation.

Eventually, the pair believes the idea can turn into a book — a collection of what people think about happiness, and the things that truly make people happy, across the country. Right now when you go into a bookstore, the best seller list often includes a self-help book on



Paula Francis, left, and Linda Wheatley walk through downtown Franklin as they were here on their way South promoting happiness.

happiness.

"It's happy this, happy that," Francis said. "This is really important to people."

The big three are family, friendships and community.

"Caring for each other and making other people happy also often makes us happy," Francis said.

Across the country, health, education, freedom, nature, music and pets are some other common important themes.

"It's not anything that is surprising or mind-blowing," Francis

said. "But we notice that people are not saying that more income, or bigger cars make them happy. The things that the media, especially commercials, are telling us will make us happy, are not the same as what people really want."

As the pair has traveled further South, another theme comes up — Faith, God and the spirit.

Locally, they remember stopping by Bradshaw's in Carrsville. While they were having lunch, a patron



Linda Wheatley, left, and Paula Francis, right, stop to take a break with Henry Scott, who helped them get around as they paused in Franklin for a night.

CAIN MADDEN / THE TIDEWATER NEWS

HAPPY: God, community, family important locally

FROM PAGE B1

was there talking to the ladies behind the counter.

"His wife was pregnant, and he was fretting about that, but he was also excited," Wheatley said. "And the people behind the counter, including Mrs. Bradshaw, were just giving him love and support. You could just see the family and community experience, all happening over a deli counter.

"He had grown up in that community, and they had known him all his life and cared for him."

After that, it wasn't too

surprising that the three things toward happiness that stood out in Western Tidewater, after having made stops in Suffolk, Carrsville, Franklin and Boykins, were God, community and family.

"They are all interconnected," Wheatley said.

The two women had followed the CSX railroad track into Franklin, and continued along to Boykins, where they would go into North Carolina. From there, they'd head over to Roanoke Rapids, as they continue to Raleigh and further South.

As they have travelled, the people they have met along

the way have been the best part, particularly the people generous with their time like Scott.

"People have given us rides, they've fed us and offered us places to stay. I can't believe the generosity of people," Wheatley said, adding that people have also helped them with spreading the message. "Cover 3 is a great example. We're going to talk to that group thanks to Henry."

Overall, being happy is one of the most important things you can do for yourself, the women said.

"Happiness is a choice,"

Francis said. "Things happen, and sometimes they are bad, but it is how we look at the situation, and how we chose to deal with it that makes the difference."

For more information or to get an update on their progress, visit www.happiness-walk.com

FEAST: Parents can give feedback

FROM PAGE B1

child, and then we're work-

community partners for financial support. For more information on how to get

items that the program is in need of, visit <http://www.childrenscenterva.com/>

F
Publ
Hey Bo
Have y