



A group of pole walkers raise their poles following a three-mile trek along Flagler Beach. Chrissy Powell, (wearing a pink shirt in the center of the group), a staff instructor with Flagler County's Adult Education Program, and Sheila Vidamour, (far left) a certified KeenFit instructor, offer free clinics to introduce people to pole walking.

Pole walking turns stroll into total body workout

Story and photos by Cindy Casey

Exercise is essential for living a healthy lifestyle. But finding the time for an effective, vigorous exercise regimen is a problem for many people. And finding the energy for that exercise to be effective is impossible for some.

So, what if you were told that by adding a pair of poles to that half-hour walk would be the same as taking a 50-minute jaunt without them – and you would burn 48 percent more calories?

"It's true," says Chrissy Powell, a staff instructor with the Adult Education Program in Flagler County. "You can feel the difference almost right away. And the added benefit is a total body workout – especially upper body."

Powell discovered pole walking through long-time friend Sheila Vidamour, a certified instructor for KeenFit Pole Walking.

"I got started in pole walking about a year and a half ago in Colorado while visiting my daughter," says Vidamour. "I had done some power-walking and weight training before, but as soon as I tried pole walking, I was completely hooked."

She immediately researched the KeenFit Pole Walking method and decided she had to become a certified instructor and start teaching it back home in Flagler County. She introduced Powell to the program and since last spring the pair has trained more than 200

people in pole walking at the Bell Terre Swim and Racquet Club in Palm Coast.

Pole walking stems from the sport of cross country skiing. It is believed it started in the 1930s when Finland's cross country ski coaches tried to come up with a way to keep their athletes in peak condition during the off season. Also known as Nordic walking, pole walking quickly became popular in Northern Europe as more and more people discovered the total body benefits and overall fun of the activity.

Vidamour says people with time constraints who find fitting an exercise program into their daily routine impossible would benefit from pole walking.

"You could do a 15- to 20-minute walk with fitness poles and it would be like doing a half hour walk without them," she says. "Plus, you're also getting an upper body workout at the same time."

In addition to a vigorous cardio and upper body workout, Vidamour says pole walking offers a number of health and fitness benefits.

Donna Clements of Palm Coast leads a group of pole walkers in Flagler County's Adult Education Program along Flagler Beach.



She says pole walking will jumpstart your metabolism and increase your energy level, noting that with the KeenFit technique, you'll burn 48 percent more calories, increase cardio fitness by 20 percent, strengthen your core and build upper body muscles while naturally correcting body posture and lessening the impact to your lower joints by about 26 percent.

"It doesn't matter how physically fit you are. Anyone can do this," Vidamour says. "It is a perfect exercise routine for everyone — no matter how old or what body shape."

She noted that having a certain amount of coordination is helpful, but KeenFit training techniques can help people overcome that problem if necessary.

Beverly Patrick of Palm Coast, who participates in Powell's adult fitness classes, says she started pole walking last July in 100-degree temperatures. "But I loved it," she attests. "I like to walk and I needed to do more with my upper body fitness. So this is perfect for me and I celebrated my 70th birthday in September."

Powell says an advantage to the pole walking classes she offers through Flagler County is the fact that it gets everyone outside.

"For 20 years I've been teaching fitness

classes inside," she says. "Flagler County has an abundance of amazing trails. So we've been taking advantage of all of them. We even walk the bridge."

Barbara Gilsenan of Palm Coast says she signed up for her second semester of fitness classes with Powell. "I enjoy coming to this class because of Chrissy (Powell). She is such an energetic person and makes us want to do this."

Vidamour and Powell introduce people to pole walking through free clinics that they offer in various locations.

"If people can get a group together, I'll come and do a free clinic at your location," Vidamour says. "And I'd love to get something going in Volusia County."

She says that training can take place anywhere, but she prefers holding her clinics on smooth flat surfaces, such as parking lots, to demonstration and teach the different techniques.

"It's much easier to learn the techniques on a smooth surface," Vidamour says. "But once you get the techniques down, you can do pole walking anywhere."

To learn more about KeenFit pole walking and how to get a free clinic in your area, call Vidamour at 904-540-1067 or visit her website at keenfit.com/406.