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## [Weight-loss drive starts in Tahlequah](#)

Goal is to drop 30,000 pounds by March

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Karen Ross, left, and Julie Kimble enjoy a healthy lunch Wednesday at a luncheon kicking off the Tons Off Tahlequah campaign. The campaign encourages residents to lose 15 tons over the next year.

TAHLEQUAH — Yogurt parfaits with granola and berries topped the menu Wednesday as town leaders encouraged people to get fit.

The Foundation for a Fit Future began its “Tons Off Tahlequah” campaign with a luncheon featuring the parfaits and turkey croissants, served at the Northeastern State University event center. The campaign challenges Tahlequah-area residents to lose 30,000 pounds — 15 tons — by March 2015.

“Our goal was to select a menu with healthy options,” said Dr. Laura Boren, NSU’s vice president of student affairs. “We wanted to do what we were challenging the audience to do, which is to eat healthy and exercise.”

“Enjoy your healthy lunch,” said Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett, the keynote speaker, as he detailed his city’s efforts to encourage fitness.

Cornett recalled seeing a list that ranked Oklahoma City among the most obese cities in the U.S. He said he wanted to know why.

“We had a wonderful quality of life if you happened to be a car,” he said. “We had created a business model perfect for fast-food restaurants.”

He said that on New Year’s Eve 2007, he stood in front of elephants at the Oklahoma City Zoo and declared: “This city is going on a diet.”

Cornett challenged the city’s residents to lose 1 million pounds. The city set up a “This city is going on a diet” website, on which people could sign up for the program and track their progress.

“We lost 250,000 pounds in the first year,” Cornett said.

The campaign prompted changes in the city’s infrastructure, including more sidewalks, bike lanes and a downtown park.

Weight loss also brought economic development as more people moved to Oklahoma City, Cornett said. The rising population brought more jobs, he said.

The Foundation for a Fit Future — a partnership among the city of Tahlequah, NSU, the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians — has a similar website for its Tons Off Tahlequah campaign.

Shawn Arthur, vice president of Osiyo Communications, said the website eventually will enable people to sign up for the challenge and follow their progress. He said people around Tahlequah also are encouraged to sign up.

Tahlequah Mayor Jason Nichols said the city is adding facilities and programs to encourage fitness. They include the Anthis Brennan Sports Complex under construction west of town. It will have a swimming pool, ball fields, tennis courts and a playground. The city also is working with the Cherokee Nation to build a splash pad downtown.

The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians encourages people to visit its 80-acre facility, which includes walking trails, Chief George Wickliffe said.

“I grew up in these hills,” Wickliffe said. “We had rolling hills and dirt roads. We walked daily up and down the hollers. It was natural for us to stay healthy.”

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Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett shares the story of his city’s efforts to encourage healthy living. Tons Off Tahlequah is modeled after Cornett’s campaign.