

## Women on the move for health

February 07, 2017 3:00 PM Claire Davenport  
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Morgan Dixon serves as the New Day Speaker on the uptown campus Monday, Feb. 6. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Hundreds of African-American women are up early on Saturday mornings, walking together for health. Many of those walking groups were formed as a result of [GirlTrek](#), a nonprofit organization that encourages women to use walking as a practical first step to inspire healthy living, families and communities.

GirlTrek co-founder Morgan Dixon served as the Taylor Center's [New Day Speaker](#) Monday in Freeman Auditorium on the uptown campus.

Dixon and her friend Vanessa Garrison developed the movement as a way to battle an issue close to their heart — the statistics that said they would live shorter lives

because they were black women. Dixon shared the facts with the audience stating that four out of every five black women exceed the healthy weight range and are at a higher risk for diabetes and heart disease. Dixon and Garrison decided they wanted to make a change.

“Those who are closest to the problem are often closest to the solution,” said Dixon. “The best thing about walking is that it is such a discipline, not just for black women, but for freedom fighters around the world.”

Walking 30 minutes a day is not only a good way to stay fit, but it also allows women to develop a sense of community and become active in their neighborhoods.

GirlTrek now supports more than 50,000 walkers and 500 volunteers and has a growing network of 200,000 supporters. Many experts are backing the movement in support of research that says walking is the best way to battle heart disease.

To spread the word about their project, the duo studied habit formation and used reminders, T-shirts and social media to inspire women to walk even on the coldest days.

Dixon said without these studies they couldn't have advanced their project, and advised those who are interested in social innovation to explore the cultural context of the issues they are trying to change.

*Claire Davenport is a junior at Tulane University majoring in English and Political Science.*

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“All of us are worthy of lacing up, starting fresh, and making self-care our mission.”  
Morgan Dixon

