



INNER CIRCLE

THE GUIDE TO LIVING WELL IN THE NEW ORLANDO

Orlando resident Jen Isham tries to become the Food Network's next culinary star; Dr. James Rippe, founder and director of the Rippe Lifestyle Institute, is on a mission to make Orlando healthier; Habitat for Humanity volunteer Brooks Fusselman is impacting lives, one nail at a time; fly high through ZOOM Air Adventures aerial ropes attraction at Central Florida Zoo; view a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial; even in a cool market, hot jobs abound in Central Florida; Burnham Institute for Medical Research opens its doors.



Dr. James Rippe, a leading cardiologist and founder and director of the Rippe Lifestyle Institute, aims to make Orlando the healthiest city in America.

CAN THIS GUY MAKE ORLANDO THE HEALTHIEST CITY IN AMERICA?

*Renowned cardiologist Dr. James Rippe is
on a mission to make you feel better.*

BY STEVE BLOUNT

To say that James Rippe is audacious – even brash – would be like saying that Chuck Norris has a little attitude problem. The renowned cardiologist is pug-nacious, almost pugilistic, in his pursuit of health – like Norris taking out all 12 members of a drug gang in a dozen carefully choreographed slow-motion seconds. Unlike Norris, though, Dr. Rippe is charmingly good-natured, even charismatic. In short, he’s just the kind of guy who might be able to whip chronic disease and inspire a whole bunch of people to live happier, healthier lives.

And that’s exactly what he aims to do right here in Orlando.

“One of my goals is to make Orlando the healthiest city in America,” he says, smiling as nonchalantly as if he were talking about ordering a pizza. “We’ve formed partnerships here with the University of Central Florida, Orlando Health and *Orlando Home & Leisure*. If through these partnerships we can consistently say to people – in ways they can take action on – that you can have more out of life and feel better about your life by things you do every day, that will yield a lot of benefits. If we can make

a difference in people’s lives here in Orlando, then we can serve as a model for the rest of the country.”

In short, Dr. Rippe wants to make you and me healthier and to use us as examples for the rest of America.

Coming from someone other than Dr. Rippe, that might sound a bit optimistic, even naive. The Harvard-trained physician, who currently lives outside of Boston with his wife, Stephanie, and his four daughters, teaches at Tufts University School of Medicine. He practiced at Massachusetts General Hospital and now has an enterprise-sized research and educational business. He does research for Tropicana, Quaker Oats, GE Healthcare, PepsiCo, ConAgra Foods and others. He has published 41 books – ranging from the current physicians textbook on intensive care medicine to *The Healthy Heart for Dummies* – toured the country with patient/football legend Joe Montana and has been the medical go-to guy for Food Network. Perhaps more than any other high-profile doctor, Rippe combines serious academic research chops with deep media savvy.

And then there’s the Zen piece. For a buttoned-up research



scientist, Dr. Rippe has an unusual life history. After studying literature at Harvard, he began a career making pottery. Six years later, he realized his real passion was molding people, not pots, so he enrolled in medical school at Harvard. Dr. Rippe is an epicure – albeit with a keen eye on the calories – and has a substantial wine collection. He covers the spectrum between the test tube and the wine thief. And in doing so, he’s able to connect with a wide range of people in a very direct way.

What glues it all together, and makes his mission believable, is the Rippe Lifestyle Institute. For more than two decades, Rippe has been at the center of research on how everyday habits – what we eat, how much we walk and how we handle stress – impact our health. Not just heart health, but overall health. And happiness.

“In my book *High Performance Health*, I make the case that many people view good health as the absence of disease, but that’s a very limited way of thinking,” Rippe says. “I think people should view their health as a productivity tool. The healthier you

are, the more productive you are and the happier you are. That gets to these issues of emotional well-being, stress reduction and just plain joy in your life.”

And why did this Boston-trained, Boston-based doctor choose Orlando as his guinea pig? For one thing, Rippe already has deep roots here.

“My wife, Stephanie, is a former Miss Daytona who went on to graduate from the University of Florida,” Dr. Rippe says chuckling, adding the obligatory “Go Gators.” “[University of Central Florida president] John Hitt is a longtime patient of mine, as was [former chairman of the UCF board] Dick Nunez. Dr. Hitt knows that this message is important to bring to the university community. That’s the primary reason we operate the Lifestyle Medicine Institute at UCF.”

Dr. Rippe is also Professor of Biomedical Sciences at UCF, and he performs his executive health assessments in Rippe Lifestyle Institute’s primary research office in Celebration, using a combination of state-of-the-art technology and old-

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Dr. James Rippe (right) with Rippe Health director of marketing Amy Stachnik and the Bod Pod, which measures body composition using air displacement.

fashioned education and encouragement. It was this program that helped Dr. Hitt lose 120 pounds and has helped hundreds of others in high-profile positions optimize their health and their personal performance.

And, Dr. Rippe says, as a city, Orlando has unique advantages.

“This is a place where there’s enough structure that you can get things done, but not so much structure that it prevents you from getting things done.”

The climate – both natural and civic – is conducive, too.

“There’s a lot of literature that suggests individual health is greatly impacted by community health, whether you have bike trails and walking trails and so on,” he continues. “Orlando is also blessed with a very civic-minded leadership; there are a lot of people who care about what happens in this town. Combine that with the naturally warm climate – you can exercise outdoors almost every day – and a major healthcare organization like Orlando Health that has stated its mission is not just about treating sick people but about promoting health, and you have a great platform for a bold initiative like this one.”

Dr. Rippe also believes the timing is right.

“We’ve been talking about these kinds of health issues, preventive health, for years, but people are starting to really tune in to the message.

“There’s no question that in tough economic times people experience a lot of stress. Even if you have a job and feel pretty secure, you know people who’ve lost their jobs, and it can’t help but impact your stress level. In a tough situation, you think about the things you can control, and a great place to start is to say, ‘I can’t control the stock market, but I can control whether or not I go out for a walk every day.’

“People who’ve been through research programs and start exercising regularly for the first time in their lives not only know they’re doing something good for their health, but also report over and over that they feel better; they just feel better about themselves. So you’re not only generating health benefits, but regular exercise is one of the most potent stress reducers available.”

Dr. Rippe says his partnerships – with UCF, Orlando Health and *Orlando Home & Leisure* – are keystones to the initiative’s success. Through Orlando Health, he hopes to change the way physicians interact with their patients.

“Orlando Health has a physician training program. The most powerful tool we have to affect patient behavior is the physician recommendation,” he points out. “Study after study has shown that, but in America, we’re squandering that opportunity. Less than half of smokers who have a heart attack are advised to stop smoking. It’s pretty shocking. And less than 40 percent of people who are obese are ever counseled by their doctor to lose weight. We have a very powerful tool, the prestige of your doctor saying ‘I think you should become more physically active,’ but it has to go farther than that.

“One reason those recommendations don’t get made is that it takes a lot of training to become a doctor, and the way our system is set up now, it’s unlikely the doctor is going to interrupt his day with a 15-minute counseling session on walking. What we hope to do is use the protocols we’ve developed in our research and incorporate them into the healthcare system at Orlando Health. These show doctors that they can efficiently prescribe very specific recommendations about how to move forward in a walking program, or how to eat better or lose weight without taking a lot of time from their busy practices.”

Getting physicians to counsel their patients and engaging the public through mass events and media, Dr. Rippe believes, can have an impact on the city’s overall health.

Orlando Home & Leisure has signed up to help accomplish the mission. For details on how you can become involved, see Home Front, page 6, and visit our website, ohlmag.com, and click on the Rippe Orlando Health Initiative icon.