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## Fresh foods program lifts woman 'from end of my rope'

**BY HARRY JACKSON JR.**

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When a life of yo-yo dieting failures grew into a roller coaster of emotional ups and downs, Bridgette Kossor searched for answers.

She found her 268 pounds on her frame of 5 feet, 5 inches, reflected bigger problems, she said.

Diet programs failed; self-discipline too often found itself in the cross hairs of a high-stress life.

A little more than three years ago, "I sat in my living room crying," she said. "I was at the end of my rope. I didn't know what to do.

"I had body image issues and weight issues. It was awful emotionally; it was hard physically.

"I've done every major diet, one of them 10 times," she said. "I used to do aerobics, strength training, walking, dancing and all the moving around on stage."

An in-demand singer, she often performed on the East Coast.

During one of those trips in late 2006, she learned of a program in Philadelphia run by macrobiotic diet guru Denny Waxman .

Macrobiotics is based on eating fresh food that's close to its origin from a vine or the ground. Adherents believe different food provides different values and quality of energy for life.

In early 2007 she met with Waxman for counseling. She was taken by the spiritual and mindfulness components as well as an understanding of food that was clearer to her than what she'd heard in past nutrition programs.

"He told me, when I look at my food, look to see if there's life in it or see

if it's dead," she said.

There were no scales, no tape measures, just thinking about what she ate and why she ate it.

"That day changed my life; it changed how I began to look at my food and what it was," she said.

"Five weeks after I began the program, I'd lost 25 pounds," Kossor said. "My (bad cholesterol) was in half.

"By four months, I was down 50 pounds and off my (blood pressure) meds."

The pounds continued to come off. By late 2007, she had lost more than 100 pounds.

"I'm a size 14 and I started as a size 24.

"I'd started to experience freedom," she said. "I was excited for the first time in my life about food and learning about it."

Kossor eats fresh food, cooking it in a way that maintains the nutrients and benefits. Meat isn't prohibited, just uninteresting, she said.

She eats now, not to guard against calories, but to feel better and be a better person.

By 2008, she started commuting monthly between St. Louis and Philadelphia, learning to teach the philosophy that helped her.

Fast forward to the summer of 2009.

Jaimes McNeal is the founder of Phoenix Arises, a St. Louis business that offers seminars and coaching for personal development. Kossor had been a client some years ago, and word of her weight loss and new credentials reached McNeal.

**'MY BIG REVEAL'**

In the summer of last year, McNeal designed the program, "My Big Reveal" and Kossor accepted the offer to run it.

"It's important to let people know how to look at food," she said. "We've gotten far away from food that grows in the ground, and eating it. I want to bring it to that again."

Meanwhile, Kossor runs two organic community gardens and is designing new classes for children.

She said if she met her old self today, "I would tell her there is hope, and I'd tell her she could be who she really is because by the time I got to where I was, I'd almost given up."

Would she listen?

"I think she would."

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