

# Bridgeport Mayoral Aide Now “In The Know” About Health Numbers

By: Kathleen Chaves

When Bridgeport native Thomas Gaudett, 25, attended the Know Your Numbers Campaign in February, he didn't know that his health was in danger. Gaudett, an aide and liaison between Bridgeport Mayor Joseph Ganim and the Bridgeport City Council, like others believed himself to be in perfect condition. Little did he know that he was actually more at risk than some of his colleagues.

“That day the council people and I got there an hour early and the Know Your Numbers team was still setting up,” said Gaudett. “I was poking fun at some of the other council people saying I knew their numbers weren't going to be too good. They convinced me to get checked as well so I did, and while I was getting my blood sugar taken I was joking and making a big deal saying, ‘Oh, sure, something will probably be wrong,’ said Gaudett, not thinking it possible.

When Marilyn Faber, co-chairperson of the Know Your Numbers Campaign, tested his blood sugar, it was at an alarming number: 260. Faber pulled Gaudett aside and tested his A1C, which was also at an alarming level.

“Marilyn told me my A1C was at 13.6%,” said Gaudett. “I didn't know what that meant, I thought it must have been a better number than the 260. Then she showed me a scale. The scale started at 3 which was low blood sugar and it ended at 12. There was nowhere on the chart for my reading!” said Gaudett. He was off the chart.

Prior to the campaign, and his subsequent test results, Gaudett had not had a checkup since he was in college. Faber called him every few days to make sure he followed up with a doctor, a promise he had made in lieu of going to the hospital as she had initially suggested.

“He is a healthy young man who takes care of himself but he didn't want to go to the hospital,” said Faber. “Since that day he has gotten his A1C down to 5.5%. It is now about an average A1C.”

To get to this point, Gaudett has made major changes to his life since the campaign. He researched diabetes and cut out sugar and carbohydrates almost immediately. He is exercising more and initially was put on insulin and Metformin, a prescription to manage Type 2 diabetes.

Now he is off insulin, only on Metformin, and sees his primary physician every three months.

Gaudett has no family history of diabetes, and though he was taking care of himself with a healthy diet and exercise, he still developed the Type 2 disease. “He is a good face for this campaign,” said Faber. “He didn't know he could develop diabetes, since he didn't have a family history.”

He has made major dietary changes by choosing whole grain options and cutting back on sugar and carbohydrates. He checks his blood sugar daily and wants to manage it to the point where it is as if he does not have diabetes.

Said Gaudett, “I wonder to myself when I think about it; how much longer could I have gone with an A1C of 13.6%? If I hadn't done the test I wouldn't have known. I really credit Marilyn Faber, who consistently followed up with me regarding my appointments. The Know Your Numbers Campaign saved me and I am really grateful for everything that it did for me.”

Gaudett was born and raised in Bridgeport, graduated from Fairfield College Preparatory School, and is a Harvard University graduate. He has worked on restructuring and digitizing the Bridgeport 311 system, and on issues related to making government more efficient, transparent and data-driven through technology.

Know Your Numbers is a campaign to identify heart disease and diabetes in the poor and underserved in the Greater Bridgeport area, organized by the Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Task Force of the Primary Care Action Group, a coalition of Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, area health departments, community health centers, providers and other community organizations. The *Know Your Numbers* campaign began in 2014 to empower residents with information about their health status and educate them on how to reduce their risk of chronic heart disease or diabetes. The campaign travels annually to the Bridgeport City Council to stage its launch.

The unique component is that the campaign takes free cardiac and diabetes health screenings including blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, waist circumference and BMI to people *where they are*, that is, directly to patrons of local food pantries, soup kitchens and churches, instead of in a clinical setting.

The majority of the Know Your Numbers screenings take place in February during American Heart Month.. Nursing students from St. Vincent's College, Bridgeport Hospital, Fairfield University, and Sacred Heart University contribute to the testing. Every campaign that is held gives information about doctors, and pamphlets are handed out to help people gain access and understanding



**Mayoral Aide Tom Gaudette outside The Thomas Merton Center, one of the Bridgeport sites for Know Your Numbers screenings.**