



## American Idol says 'Scale Back, Alabama'

**Ruben Studdard, nephew of Butler funeral service director, James Studdard, loses weight, challenges Alabamians to do the same**

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

BIRMINGHAM, DEMOPOLIS — "He wants to start now while he's young," says James Studdard of Weatherly-Studdard Funeral Home in Butler. "He's doing it now so he won't have the health problems that go along with being overweight."

For the Studdard family, being overweight is a trait that has been handed down through the years, and so have a myriad of health problems that are associated with it. It has been a pattern — both genetic and environmental — that has contributed to multiple health issues for the family.

But this year, the most well-known of the Studdards, James' nephew Ruben, is taking steps to break that trend, and he's leading the rest of Alabama to do the same.

After recently losing about 100 pounds, 2003 American Idol and recording artist Ruben Studdard is teaming up with the Alabama Department of Public Health, Alabama's hospitals, and Barber Dairies to launch a new program designed to promote weight loss in the state. Studdard kicked off his 'Scale Back Alabama' campaign last week in Birmingham, challenging Alabamians to lose a collective 10 million pounds over the next 8 weeks.

And in a state where more than 61% of the population is at least somewhat overweight, the program is a much-needed part of the fight for a healthy Alabama.

Based on several statistical studies — including the National Center for Health Statistics,



Submitted photo 2003 American Idol and recording artist Ruben Studdard is promoting weight-loss program that could earn someone \$1,000 in prize money.

StateMaster.com, and Trust for America's Health — Alabama ranks near the top when it comes to the highest percentages of overweight or obese members of the population.

Trust for American's Health ranks the state as number two in the nation in obesity (having a very high amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass, or a Body Mass Index of 30 or greater). Over 28.9% of the state's population falls into that category as of 2004, a percentage that is more than five percentage points higher than the national average.

Only Mississippi is higher, at 29.5%.

When it comes to those who are simply overweight, in addition to those who are considered obese, Alabama still ranks 2nd in most studies. According to the National Center for Health Statistics and StateMaster.com, the state is second only to West Virginia, which stands at 61.2%.

In practically every study available, Alabamians are fat, and getting fatter. Since the mid-80's, the state's obesity rate has more than doubled, according to Center for Disease Control records. In 1986, less than 10% of Alabamians were considered obese, but

by 1995, that number had risen above 15%, and by 2000, more than 20% of Alabamians were considered obese. Now, 6 years later, despite repeated attempts to combat the problem, the percentage is still climbing.

During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States as a whole. In 1985, no state registered an obesity percentage of over 14%, but by 1991, four states had obesity rates of 15-19%. Yet still no state had a rate at or above 20%.

In 2005, however, only 4 states had obesity rates LESS than 20%, while 17 states had rates equal to or greater than 25%.

Studies suggest that obesity can be caused by a combination of eating habits and a sedentary lifestyles. But it can also be augmented by genetics. "I guess about 70% of our relatives are overweight," James Studdard told the Sun. "My mother was overweight and she passed away at a fairly early age of congestive heart failure, diabetes, and high blood pressure."

With much of the Studdard family having inherited similar health problems, they are part of a large number of Americans who suffer from

weight-related health issues. People who are significantly overweight are much more prone to develop Type II Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, breast and colon cancer, gall bladder problems, and high blood pressure, among other illnesses. For many, the tendency to be overweight or obese begins in childhood. Today, about 17% of children ages 2-19 are considered significantly overweight, and the numbers are climbing. According to his uncle, as a child Studdard was always somewhat larger than others his age, with much of his weight attributed to genetic make-up and a large frame. "I've got pictures of Ruben when he played pee-wee football," says Studdard. "He was big even then, much bigger than the other boys on the team."

Whether his problem was related to genetics or simply eating habits, Studdard decided to take action to combat his weight problem. That action included an exercise program and drastic changes in eating habits that meant cutting out fried foods, soft drinks, sweets, and other fatty treats.

Armed with his own success story, through the Scale Back Alabama program Studdard is encouraging people statewide to lose weight, and earn some prize money, as well. The program calls for the formation of teams of three to five people who will compete for a grand prize of \$1,000 per person on the team. The team with the most weight lost on a percentage basis from all of those participating statewide will win the grand prize.

For those in the Choctaw County area, Bryan Whitfield Memorial Hospital in Demopolis will be hosting official 'weigh-in' days for teams who wish to participate in the campaign. To 'weigh-in' teams must go to the hospital's Wellness Center between 4:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. on January 22 to record their benchmark weight. Teams will then return on March 19 to record their final weight.

For those who participate, the goal could be much more than just \$1,000. It may mean dramatic changes that save them from the myriad of health problems associated with obesity.

Although James says that his nephew is in good

health, and so far has none of the problems that have plagued his family members, he simply wants to ensure that those problems do not develop.

"I'm not where I want to be," Ruben reported in a press release about Scale Back Alabama, "but I'm on the right track, and I'm excited about encouraging other Alabamians to begin their own weight loss journeys. If I can lose

nearly 100 pounds in six months, I truly believe that others can be as successful in reaching their goals."

(ED. NOTE: Information about the Scale Back Alabama program is available online at [www.scalebackalabama.com](http://www.scalebackalabama.com) or contact Betsy Adams in the BWWMH Wellness Center at 287-2613.)

### U.S. obesity stats

- 58 million overweight; 40 million obese; 3 million morbidly obese (more than 100 pounds overweight)
- Eight out of 10 adults over age 25 are overweight.
- 78% of American's do not meet basic activity level recommendations
- 25% are completely sedentary
- There has been a 76% increase in Type II diabetes in adults 30-40 yrs old since 1990.
- 80% of Type II diabetes cases are related to obesity
- 70% of cardiovascular disease cases are related to obesity
- 42% of cases of breast and colon cancer are among obese individuals
- 30% of gall bladder surgery cases are related to obesity
- 26% of obese people have high blood pressure

### Costs of obesity:

- Type II Diabetes (\$63.14 Billion)
- Hypertension (\$3.23 Billion)
- Heart Disease (\$6.99 Billion)
- Post-menopausal breast cancer (\$2.32 Billion)
- Colon Cancer (\$2.78 Billion)
- Workdays lost: \$39.3 Million
- Physician office visits: \$62.7 Million
- Restricted Activity days: \$29.9 Million
- Bed-Related days: \$89.5 Million

### Tips for preventing weight gain

- Avoid foods that are high in fat and sugar.
- Reduce how much alcohol you drink.
- Avoid stress, frustration, and boredom.
- If you are depressed, seek medical treatment.
- Avoid a sedentary lifestyle by increasing your activity level.
- Perform aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, 3 times a week.
- Increase physical activity by walking rather than driving.
- Climb stairs rather than using an elevator or escalator.
- Always talk to your health care provider before starting an exercise program.
- Join a support group. Many people find it easier to follow a diet and exercise program if they join a group of people with similar problems.
- Set realistic goals for weight loss. A loss of 1 to 2.5 pounds a week may seem slow, but losing weight too fast often does not work. Weight lost quickly usually comes back quickly.

## Ms. Wheelchair Alabama, America to visit Mobile

MOBILE — People for People, Consumer Advocacy Group of The Independent Living Center of Mobile, will sponsor a visit to Mobile by Ms. Wheelchair America/Alabama 2005, Triston Wright.

Co-sponsors for the event include United Cerebral Palsy of Mobile, Independent Living Center Auxiliary and the Independent Living Center of Mobile.

Ms. Wright will speak on Jan. 17 at Goodwill Easter Seals, 2448 Gordon Smith Drive, in Mobile. Her topic will be: "Extraordinary Abilities May Unite Us." Reservations, requests for accommodations and information may be obtained by calling 251 460-0301, Extension # 102.

Ms. Wright was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy shortly after her birth in 1975. She is also an accomplished and articulate spokesperson for millions of Americans who use wheelchairs. She is a freelance artist and has worked for Fireworks of Alabama. She enjoys oil painting, arts and crafts,

reading, and modeling and has been a volunteer for the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art and Habitat for Humanity. She has also served as a member of the Montgomery Advisory Board for Independent Living.

"God has . . . a plan for me," she says, adding that she sees her role as Ms. Wheelchair America/Alabama 2005 as a calling. "During my year, I was blessed with the opportunity of making numerous personal appearances and presentations regarding the abilities of people with disabilities. However, my goal of being an advocate, an educator, and a promoter of issues concerning people with disabilities, while at the same time serving as an inspiration and encouragement to all people by demonstrating what the word 'ability' truly means, did not end the day my year came to a close. Instead, I directed even more energy to accomplishing this goal."

Ms. Wright has spoken to over 200,000 people since the beginning of her reign in 2005.

## Diabetic shoes now available locally

By Ron Duncan  
Healthcare ProductsLLC

It was the elder statesman, Benjamin Franklin, who is credited with coining the phrase: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." An old Arab proverb states: "Dig the well before you get thirsty." But the great Mickey Mantle perhaps said it best with the statement: "If I had know I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself."

Medicare began adopting this philosophy several years ago because the rising cost of medical care would eventually bankrupt the program. This was especially true in the rise of diabetes, with more and more American falling victim to this illness. In the latter part of the 1990's Medicare was becoming increasingly alarmed at the number of amputations of the lower extremities among diabetics. The growing medical costs of surgeries, as well as rehabilitations treatment and prosthetics for amputees, motivated Medicare to search for any preventive measures that could reduce these expenses

along with the cost in human suffering.

Medicare commissioned the medical department at Louisiana State University to study and resolve the problem. After extensive research, the doctors involved in the study arrived at one primary conclusion: poor circulation in the feet and toes resulting from ill-fitting shoes!

Durable Medical Equipment companies (DME's) were then contracted by Medicare to supply therapeutic shoes to diabetics, with Medicare setting the price of the services supplied by these companies. Applying this principle of "prevention" would hopefully reduce such a drastic rise in medical expenses over the years to come. This would become a benefit under Medicare, Part B.

More recently, Medicare has added such items as the "foot/ankle gauntlet" and the "Aqua Relief System Pump" which aid in better circulation and relief from pain for both diabetics and non-diabetics.

The objective for all of these items: Keep the blood flowing, promoting good vascular health, avoiding pain and the pos-



Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell BUTLER — Ron Duncan, an orthotic fitter, is shown here at Choctaw County's recent Health Fair where he displayed a variety of special shoes for diabetics offered by his company, Health Care Products, LLC.

sible loss of limbs. (ED NOTE: Ron Duncan is an orthotic fitter with Healthcare Products, LLC, he can be reached at 850-723-5832).