

## CITY DWELLERS EXERCISE MORE

*Suburbanites lag in walking study*

By Janet Frankston

People who live in urban areas – cities with a equal mix of housing, retail and office space – are 2.4 times more prone to get the amount of physical activity recommended by the federal government than their suburban neighbors.

A study of metro Atlantans versus suburban Atlantans, released last week, reveals that people are likely to meet the government's requirement of 30 minutes of exercise five days a week if they live in a more accessible community.

"If you choose neighborhoods that provide convenient, safe access to shops and services, you're more likely to get the recommended amount of physical activity that is required for your health and well being," commented Lawrence Frank, co-author of the study and former professor at Georgia Technical Institute. Frank is currently professor at the University of British Columbia.

The study appears in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine because its research led to the conclusion that 38 percent of the participants who lived in the most pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods met government recommendations, and 18 percent of those who live in the least walkable places barely met their half-hour of exercise.

Last month, new federal guidelines were released suggesting *at least* 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic disease. If participants raised the minimum to 60 minutes of physical activity, they showed an increased ability to manage body weight more efficiently.

Data for the study came from 357 Atlantans who wore pedometers for two days in 2001 and 2002. The study, officially named SMARTRAQ, is also part of a much larger travel behavior and land-use study based on 8,000 Atlanta area households, both in and out of metro Atlanta.

However, the study was unable to determine if participants merely walked about the neighborhood shopping or simply took the stairs versus the elevator at work. "The workplace is as important a factor in fitness as where people live," Diana Wheeler, Director of Community Development in Alpharetta, pointed out. She also said the journey on a walk is just as important as the destination. A prime example is the competition for prime parking at the local shopping mall.

"The parking lot is not a memorable experience," she said. "If people enjoy the experience from one point to another, then the destination becomes secondary."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Georgia Department of Transportation, and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority helped to fund SMARTRAQ.

