



Doctor

HEALTH

By Michael Candelaria

DR. JAMES RIPPE COMBINES HEART AND HEAD IN A PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE AND FITNESS.

»» As an avid runner, Dr. James Rippe had for many years been personally interested in sports and nutrition. So, with training at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, his gravitation toward cardiovascular medicine was a natural. Then came a decision that today is transforming how many doctors and patients perceive health. Rippe moved toward *preventing* heart disease instead of trying to cure the disease after patients were diagnosed. In the mid-1980s, he established an exercise physiology laboratory that eventually broadened to include nutrition and weight management.

That lab now has evolved into, reportedly, the world's largest research organization exploring how daily habits and actions impact short- and long-term health and quality of life.

Under the umbrella of Rippe Health, the Rippe Lifestyle Institute focuses on research, while the Rippe Health Evaluation is an executive health diagnostic and treatment program. Both operations are based in Celebration, Florida, just south of downtown Orlando. Additionally, Rippe, who spends part of his work life in Massachusetts as a Tufts University School of Medicine associate professor, consults with other doctors and publishes academic papers, books and journals, including the *American Journal of*



PHOTOS BY PHELAN EBENHACK

Lifestyle Medicine, the first academic, peer-reviewed, national journal on the topic. He also serves as chair of the Center for Lifestyle Medicine at the University of Central Florida (UCF), the first university-based organization to conduct basic research and teach students at all levels in the area of lifestyle medicine. Rippe also is a professor of biomedical sciences at UCF.

Buoyed by that intellectual capital, plus an alliance with the Orlando Health hospital system, Rippe has designs on helping turn Orlando into a showplace for his innovating ideas.

T Texture: There's a movement afoot, it seems, to make Orlando the healthiest city in the nation. Can that really happen?

jr Dr. James Rippe: You have to start somewhere, and in academic medicine we often start with demonstration projects in a limited area. Why not

Orlando? Orlando has tremendous advantages going for it. There's the year-round warm climate; it has a powerful and large university in the University of Central Florida, which has a new medical school; it has a medical city being planned at Lake Nona with the Tavistock Group; and it also has a very visionary healthcare community. ... There are so many things that point to Orlando as being the ideal place for this.

T Can subtle lifestyle changes make a difference in a person's health, or must the changes be substantial?

jr There are incremental, small changes that should be able to fit into the fabric of your life. For example, if you are obese and you lose 5 percent of your body weight, you get tremendous benefits. You can lower the risk of diabetes, lower the risk of heart disease. You don't have to get back to your college weight to get those benefits. You just have to stop the forward progress, not gain any more weight and, optimally, lose about 5 percent. If you are sedentary, just walking 30 minutes a day can dramatically lower your risk of both heart disease and diabetes.

T Other variables are involved in good health, such as genetics, perhaps environment and even luck. How do those variables factor into the institute's work?

jr There's no question that some people are more predisposed to gain weight. It's complicated. But, for most people, weight is about 60 percent genetically determined, and 40 percent is determined by what you do every day. You have control over 40 percent of that health equation. Those people who, from family background, are genetically predisposed to cancers, heart disease and obesity are the very people who ought to be paying the most attention to what they do every

day. For example, it's now estimated that over 50 percent of all cancers have a lifestyle component.

T The idea of a "world-class assembly of medical expertise," as your institute promises, sounds good. How is that achieved?

jr It starts with leadership. Through our Institute's work, I have an international reputation in this area. And I'm blessed to have as my research director and colleague on the faculty of UCF, Dr. Ted Angelopoulos. He's a former Rhodes Scholar and a brilliant scientist. We recruit people from all over the country. In our executive health program at the Institute, for example, we have Dr. Katia Gugucheva as director of Executive Women's Health. She trained at Yale. Once you get these kinds of things going, you start getting like-minded people who join you. And with Orlando Health, it's a collaboration of mutual shared interest.

T Big picture, what is the ultimate goal for your work?

jr My goal is to help people understand that what they do on a daily basis profoundly impacts their long-term health and quality of life. Even more than that, I would like to see a paradigm shift in how we view health. I wrote a book that was published a couple of years ago, called *High-Performance Health*. The basic premise of that book was that most people, I found, view good health as the absence of disease. That's a very limited way of thinking about health. I want people to think about health as a performance tool. Good health is not just 'not being sick.' It's about feeling vital and happy and energetic. Then we can start getting people to say, 'I want a part of that.' And that's what we're trying to accomplish with our work in Orlando.

For more information about Dr. Rippe, his research laboratory and executive health program, visit www.ripppehealth.com.

