

No-Shave November grows health awareness

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Things are getting a little hairy at the Howard County executive office building in Ellicott City.

That's not a reference to politics run amok – it's just a description of the facial hair situation these days among county staffers and even a few council members.

Howard County Executive Kittleman is participating in No-Shave November, also known as "Movember," a month-long pledge to let moustaches and beards grow wild and free in order to raise awareness for a particular cause, or just for the fun of it. Many No-Shave November participants focus on prostate cancer; Kittleman has broadened his message to all men's health issues. In a video posted to social media at the beginning of the month, he challenged men throughout the county to join in.

"I'll be the first to admit, I'm not very good at scheduling routine physicals, dental exams or seeing my doctor when I'm sick," Kittleman says in the clip. "I'm pledging to be better about it personally, but also this month, whenever I get a sideways glance or someone asks me why I haven't shaved, I'll be sure to tell them why."

He and others will donate the money they save on beard maintenance for the month to a charity of each person's choice that focuses on prevention, screening and treatment of men's diseases.

Since he started growing his own beard, "it's given me a chance to talk about the importance of yearly screenings and physicals," says Kittleman, who described the stubble as "very itchy at times."

It's become a conversation starter at town halls and special events: "I look like I'm a little disheveled," Kittleman admitted as he launched into an introduction at a recent community meeting in North Laurel, before explaining the premise of No-Shave November to the gathered crowd. "I don't want you to think I'm disrespecting the community by not shaving for the last couple days," he said, apologetically.

Though there's no official count – participation in No-Shave November is strictly optional – lots of Kittleman's staffers have joined in on the fun. Deputy Chief of Staff Jahantab Siddiqui, Finance Director Stan Milesky, County Spokesman Andy Barth, Chief Administrative Officer Lonnie Robbins, Housing Director

Tom Carbo and Public Works Director Jim Irvin all count among the freshly bearded this month. Howard County Fire Chief John Butler is not allowed to grow a moustache or beard due to department rules, so he's sprouting hair from his normally smooth head instead.

Two councilmembers, Fulton Republican Greg Fox and Ellicott City Democrat Jon Weinstein, have joined in as well. For Weinstein, the decision was particularly personal. He lost his father to bladder cancer late last month, and first grew out his beard as part of the Jewish tradition of shiva, a week-long mourning period for departed loved ones. He decided to keep

the facial hair for the rest of the month to coincide with No-Shave November.

"It worked out that this is also men's health awareness month," Weinstein said. "My father was a person who was stubborn about going to the doctor to get checked out for anything. So my hope is just raising awareness about men not being stubborn, going to see the doctor."

Outside of government, others have joined in the effort, including attorney Mike Davis, Apple Ford owner Chip Doetsch and West Friendship Elementary School Principal Aaron Tark, among others.

Despite the camaraderie Movember

has built, Kittleman says he won't keep his beard once the month through. "Dec. 1, this'll be gone," promised.

Others aren't so sure: "I've shaved minutes off my morning" by foregoing razor, Siddiqui said.