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NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2016 HEALTHIEST WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



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Gainesville, Fla.— Today, Florida Department of Health announced the 80 communities recognized as 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champions, including three communities in the Gainesville area. The recognition program highlights local government efforts to increase physical activity and improve nutrition as part of Healthiest Weight Florida.

“By working toward creating healthy environments, these local governments have shown their commitment to improving the health of all Floridians,” said State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. John Armstrong. “We are proud to see the number of recognized communities growing steadily each year.”

Local governments can implement a variety of policies that help people become more physically active and encourage better nutrition. These “best practice” policies are reflected in the Healthy Weight Community Champion Recognition Program. Examples of criteria for the recognition include whether a jurisdiction maintains a system of parks, provides incentive programs to attract grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods and prioritizes personal safety in areas where people can increase physical activity.

Local Community Champions and their program highlights are as follows.

Alachua County

Since 2015, construction has been completed on a major North West 16th Ave. corridor project, adding bicycle ‘sharrows’ and widening sidewalks to make the road more accessible for cars and pedestrians.

“Alachua County is proud to be recognized as a Healthy Weight Community Champion for the third year in a row,” said Employee Wellness Coordinator Amy Childs. “It’s clear by reshaping our environments, we are allowing for better access to physical activity in our daily routines.”

City of Newberry

City highlights include a Mayor-initiated Newberry Fitness Challenge, UF/IFAS Family Nutrition Center-taught Cooking Matters classes, Newberry Branch Library’s Newberry Walking Club, and the Suwannee River Area Health Education Center-taught Tools to Quit Tobacco program.

“The city of Newberry is honored to be recognized for a third consecutive year by the State of Florida as a Healthy Weight Community Champion,” said Wendy Kinser, Grants and Special Projects Administrator. “Of course, this is an honor made possible through assistance, time, and effort given by so many different groups and individuals that this is possible. This year has been full of activities and programs such as a sidewalk improvement plan to provide residents a safer, more connected system, a series of ‘Cooking Matters’ classes to promote good nutrition and healthy eating, the Mayor’s ‘Newberry Fitness Challenge’ to encourage regular physical activity and healthy weight, and the ‘Tools to Quit Tobacco’ classes at the library to help residents stop smoking. As opportunities promoting healthy living continue to gain momentum, their impact becomes clear. We are hearing success stories from both kids and adults about what works or doesn’t work when it comes to making positive changes, and about healthy choices they’ve made and how much better they feel as a result. Now, that’s inspiring to hear!”

Levy County

City of Cedar Key

The city has redeveloped 10 miles of Cedar Key roadways and added sidewalks to make the roadways safer bikers and walkers. Cedar Key has two parks, one is being developed for walking trails and the second is working on updating infrastructure for the play yard.

“Cedar Key is happy to be recognized as a Healthy Weight Community Champion for 2016,” said Cedar Key City Commissioner Sue Colson. “We are fully committed to reenergizing our communities with safer roadways and sidewalks and improving our infrastructure to better accommodate health.”

About Healthiest Weight Florida

Healthiest Weight Florida is a public-private collaboration bringing together state agencies, not-for-profit organizations, businesses and entire communities to help Florida's children and adults make consistent, informed choices about healthy eating and active living. To learn more about how to be active and make nutritious food choices, visit www.healthiestweightflorida.com.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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