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NORTHEAST FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2016 HEALTHIEST WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



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Tallahassee, Fla.— Today, Florida Department of Health announced the 80 communities recognized as 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champions, including 12 communities in the Jacksonville 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.

Bradford County

The county promotes safety through neighborhood crime watch communities.

“Bradford County is excited to announce our 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champion Recognition,” said Eddie Lewis, Chairman of the Bradford County Commissioners. “Keeping our communities safe means keeping our residents healthy, and we’re committed to building on this success.”

City of Starke

The city provides healthy food and beverage options at city sponsored events.

“In the City of Starke, we’re elated to be recognized as a Healthy Weight Community Champion for the first time ever,” said Tom Ernharth, City Manager. “Our residential communities are our foundations for good health, and we are happy to achieve this goal for our work in keeping Starke a safe place to live.”

Clay County

Town of Penney Farms

There are several walk-a-thons that take place in town and the town has a passive park of approximately 2.5 acres with pedestrian pathways through the woodlands.

“The Town of Penney Farms has achieved a tremendous community accomplishment in being recognized as a Healthy Weight Community Champion for the second year in a row,” said Town Manager, David J. Cooper. “Our commitment to incorporating more opportunities for health and physical activity is a priority in Penney Farms, and our work is paying off.”

Duval County

City of Jacksonville

The city adopted legislation that declares the need for crosswalks, as a result, ten pilot pedestrian actuated mid-block crosswalks are now being installed and more are funded in the coming year.

“The city of Jacksonville is proud to receive the Healthy Weight Community Champion recognition for the first time,” said City Council Member Lori Boyer. “We are committed to making our city more pedestrian friendly and in doing so we are investing in health both now and for the future.”

Putnam County

Putnam County owns and maintains a popular ball park in Putnam County and a swimming area at Middleton Beach which is free and open to the public.

“Putnam County is thrilled to be recognized as a 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champion,” said Tess Simpson, Recreation Manager for Putnam County Parks and Recreation. “We’re happy to be able to provide places for residents and visitors that are not only free to use, but that are unique to our county.”

City of Palatka

The city provides water as an option at all city sponsored events and for events with food, the city always provides sugar-free options and fruit for dessert selections. The City of Palatka Community Redevelopment Agency is in the process of developing a streetscape masterplan that incorporates complete streets best practices for three blighted areas downtown.

Town of Pomona Park

The town received assistance in gathering nutrition education, physical education, and physical activity information needed to apply for the Healthier US Schools Challenge. Three schools were awarded the HUSSC at a board meeting SY2015 Ochwilla Gold, Interlachen Elementary and Melrose received the silver level.

“Pomona Park is delighted to once again achieve the Healthy Weight Community Champion

Recognition,” said Mayor John Bergquist. “We are seeing great improvements in our schools in regards to nutrition and physical activity. This award will only serve to solidify our focus in becoming one of the best communities for health in the state.”

Town of Welaka

The town of Welaka and the Welaka State Park hosted a 5K and there were 60 plus out-of-town people that participated. Additionally, excitement and participation in Pickle ball continues to grow in Welaka and the Town feels that they could add another court adjacent to the basketball court.

“Welaka is proud to represent Putnam County as one of the newly recognized 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champions,” said Mayor Gordon Sands. “We offer a variety of different activities to keep residents engaged in health year-round, and I’m excited to continue these efforts moving forward.”

City of Crescent City

The city continues to work with the Putnam Health & Fitness Center in Pomona Park to increase organized physical activity and this past year donated \$1,000 towards fitness and youth activity efforts.

“In Crescent City, we are happy to again be awarded the Healthy Weight Community Champion Recognition,” said Patrick Kennedy, City Manager . “We have made new investments to support physical activity that are translating into healthier children, adults and families.”

St. Johns County

St. Johns County currently maintains over 4600 acres of active and passive recreation parks, 13 boat ramps and miles of paved trails for jogging and cycling. Over 70% of the parks in St. Johns County are active based recreation parks supporting a number of activities including but not limited to; softball, baseball fields, lacrosse, soccer, football, swim, tennis, basketball, jogging and hiking trails.

“St. Johns County is proud of our continued success for health in our communities,” said Joy Andrews, Assistant County Administrator. “The 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champion Recognition is another accomplishment that represents the culmination of our hard work, and we will remain committed to serving the people of our county in the best way possible.”

Union County

The County participates in the local School Health Advisory Committee, Community Health Improvement Plan, and in Mobilizing Action through Planning Partnerships to promote healthy choices for residents.

City of Lake Butler

The city prioritizes the support and maintenance of a network of walking trails or routes and maintains a system of parks promoting physical activity for residents and visitors.

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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