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## **SOUTHWEST FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2017 HEALTHY WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS**



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**Fort Myers, Fla.**—Today, the Florida Department of Health recognized 98 communities as the 2017 Healthy Weight Community Champions. Florida's county and municipal governments play an important role in decreasing the prevalence of unhealthy weight in their jurisdictions. Local governments can implement a variety of policies that have been shown to increase physical activity and improve nutrition. These best practice policies are reflected in the Healthy Weight Community Champion submission criteria. Between August and December 2016, local governments were invited to submit best practice policies they have implemented in their jurisdictions.

The Community Champions program is part of the department's Healthiest Weight Florida initiative. Healthiest Weight Florida is a public-private collaboration bringing together state agencies, local governments, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations and entire communities to help Florida's children and adults make consistent, informed choices about healthy eating and active living.

Local Community Champions and their program highlights are below.

### **Charlotte County**

Charlotte County aims to improve the health of all citizens. The School Board of Charlotte County enforces a wellness policy for students, faculty, staff and families that promotes healthy habits regarding physical activity and nutrition. The county encourages community gardens and actively collaborates with local agencies and citizens groups to create and use gardens to improve the health and quality of life of residents.

### **City of Cape Coral**

The city of Cape Coral prioritizes the health and wellness of their citizens and employees. The city offers a free "Lunch and Learn" for employees each month on topics such as stroke prevention, healthy grocery shopping, stress relief, heart disease,

desk-ercise, diabetes prevention and many others. The city also offers reimbursement of gym membership fees to all employees who visit a gym at least eight times within a calendar month.

### **City of Sanibel**

The city of Sanibel has only 62 miles of public roadways, but boasts over 25 miles of shared use paths. Bicycles are used extensively within the city primarily for recreation and, to a lesser extent, as a form of transportation to school, work, shopping and recreational sites. The city of Sanibel Recreation Center and Center4Life both offer a variety of physical activity options as well as complimentary community health screening and educational sessions. Additionally, the city has an interlocal (shared use) agreement with The Sanibel School for the use of the gymnasium, ball fields, pavilion and playground.

### **Collier County**

Collier County has an award-winning park system. The Parks and Recreation Division won the 2016 Agency Excellence Award from the Florida Recreation and Parks Association. Perhaps the most impactful development in 2016 was the upgrade to the County's pickle ball facilities for the 2016 U.S. Open Pickle Ball Championships. This event was the largest pickle ball tournament in the world with over 800 participants and 10,000 spectators. These upgraded facilities are open to the public and further improvements are currently underway.

### **DeSoto County**

DeSoto County Board of County Commissioners added a Traffic Circulation Element annex to their comprehensive plan. This annex describes the county's direction to develop a pedestrian and bicycle improvement/construction program and to conduct a countywide inventory of existing sidewalks, crosswalks and other pedestrian facilities.

### **Glades County**

Glades County is working on an exciting new improvement project to promote physical activity. The Moore Haven Canal Project will make improvements along the canal, including seven miles of new walkways, picnic facilities and covered pavilions.

### **Hendry County**

Hendry County was recently awarded a technical assistance grant to identify and prioritize core initiatives for economic and community development. Five core initiatives include infrastructure, housing, education/workforce training, health and human services and commercial/community development. The county was also recognized as a National Outdoor Exercise Demonstration Site by PlayCore. The outdoor equipment promotes physical activity for the adults who may be supervising their children on the playground.

## **Highlands County**

Highlands County is proud of its system of parks which encompasses 49 parks, including 39 boat ramps and approximately 1,488 acres of park land. There is a total of 15.11 miles of maintained trails system and 18 existing trailheads in Highlands County. In addition, the county allows for mobile cart vending for fresh produce and offers a community garden in the Avon Park Housing Authority.

## **About Healthiest Weight Florida**

To learn more about Healthiest Weight Florida, please visit [www.HealthiestWeightFL.com](http://www.HealthiestWeightFL.com). A list of the 2017 Champion Communities and best practices can be found online at: [www.HealthiestWeightFL.com/Recognition.html](http://www.HealthiestWeightFL.com/Recognition.html).

## **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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