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SOUTHWEST FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2016 HEALTHIEST WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



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Fort Myers, Fla.— Today, Florida Department of Health announced the 80 communities recognized as 2016 Healthy Weight Community Champions, including six communities in the Fort Myers 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.

Collier County

City of Marco Island

Marco Island has a farmers market that runs from November through April and is accessible by sidewalk, shared use pathways, and the county-wide transit system.

Glades County

Glades County is partnering with Goodwheels to provide public transportation from rural communities to Okeechobee Publix and Walmart locations, as well as local farmers markets, increasing access to fresh produce.

"It's a great honor to be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said Commissioner Tim Stanley, Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners. "We could not have done it

without a tremendous amount of help from our community partners in Glades County."

Hendry County

Hendry County participated in the Healthier Me campaign, which promotes weighing less by participating in more physical activity. Additionally, the school district adjusted their menus to align with national guidelines.

"We are thrilled to be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said County Administrator Charles T. Chapman, IV. "We hope the Healthier Me campaign is just the first step toward helping all citizens of Hendry County embrace a healthier lifestyle."

Lee County

LeeTran has had a three year increase of 35 percent in ridership and has updated bus stop locations using grant funding amenities such as shelters with solar powered lighting and (where spacing permits) a trash receptacle and bike racks. Currently, LeeTran has completed approximately 37 upgrades (out of a total of 50) to bus stops, with more locations being selected.

"Being named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion is something that could not happen without all residents in Lee County making the decision to be healthy," said Stephanie Figueroa, Human Resources Director for Lee County. "We are looking to continue our efforts in to 2016."

City of Sanibel

The city of Sanibel Recreation Center operates an after school care program for children in grades Kindergarten through eighth in which all participants are provided with a healthy snack. Additionally, during the 2015 Summer Camp program all campers were provided a healthy free breakfast and lunch through the Summer Food Service Program which was federally funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

"Our entire community embraces our philosophy of 'Fit 4 Life' for all citizens and all fitness levels," said Mayor Kevin Ruane. "We strive to have a community where it is easy and fun for every resident to enjoy an active and healthy lifestyle every day."

City of Fort Myers

Fort Myers has been honored for its commitment to build cost-effective, high performing and environmentally-friendly buildings. Certified projects include: JetBlue Fenway South, Six Mile Cypress Preserve Interpretive Center, The Broadway Apartments and Stella Apartments (Both using the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and the SWFL Affordable Housing Choice Foundation).

"The city of Fort Myers is proud of the efforts and successes over the last year in providing healthy choices for people of all ages," said Interim City Manager Saeed Kazemi. "It's an honor to be recognized as a Healthiest Weight Community Champion."

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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