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WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2016 HEALTHIEST WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



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

Citrus County

Citrus County has two breastfeeding cafes located in Lecanto and Inverness, which are open to the public. The county also offers a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program that provides education to mothers.

Manatee County

Manatee County hosts a weekly farmers market in downtown Bradenton during Florida growing season. The county also encourages new initiatives such as the development of Geraldson Community Farm mobile market and the development of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences community gardens. The farmers market, mobile market, and community gardens will work collectively to increase access to healthier foods.

"Being named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion validates the countless hours of selfless work of the people in Manatee County," said Karen Windon, Deputy County

Administrator. "We are dedicated to continuing to provide access to healthy fruits and vegetables to our community."

City of Bradenton

Bradenton currently has nine parks covering a total of 63.9 acres. The city is in the process of developing a tenth park that will include a community garden and kayak launch.

"The city of Bradenton is thrilled to once again be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said Mayor Wayne Poston. "This is a recognition of the continued efforts of the people in Bradenton to adopt a healthy lifestyle."

Pinellas County

City of Safety Harbor

The most recent addition to the Safety Harbor park system is Folly Farms, a 10-acre passive park and community garden. Additionally, the city commission extended a contract with Jolley Trolley to provide residents continued access to the weekly farmers market in Dunedin and a grocer at Countryside Mall.

"The city of Safety Harbor continues to be innovative in providing healthy choices for its citizens," said Matt Spoor, City Manager. "We are honored to once again be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion."

City of Clearwater

In order to promote physical activity, the city implemented a program called Healthy Choices for a Healthy Clearwater in which local employees and residents can sign up by committing to make at least one healthy choice a day. After signing up, the member receives an ID card that gives them access to discounts with local businesses that have signed on to partner with the program.

"We are pleased that our local efforts to improve the wellbeing of our citizens has been recognized as a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said Wellness Specialist Regina Novak. "We remain dedicated to improving the safety and livability of our residential districts."

City of Largo

Largo sponsors a walking program, three outdoor fitness zones, and trail markers to various destinations promoting physical activity in the community.

"Last year we were recognized for promoting healthy eating," said Director of Parks, Recreation and Arts Joan Byrne. "We are excited that our efforts to promoting a more active lifestyle has once again been honored by having Largo named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion."

City of St. Petersburg

In May 2015, Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin launched Healthy St. Pete, a citywide community engagement and empowerment initiative. Together, with the help of the Mayor's Office, Parks and Recreation department, and community partners, St. Petersburg will work to

address the needs of the community – to improve the quality of life for those in our community through access, environment and lifestyle choices.

"Through the Healthy St. Pete initiative, the City of St. Petersburg is working hard to build a culture of health for our community," said Kim Brasher, Healthy St. Pete Program Supervisor of the Parks and Recreation Department. "We are excited that our efforts have led to St. Petersburg being named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion."

City of Pinellas Park

The Community Garden, initiated in 2008, offers raised garden boxes to residents at a minimal charge of \$15 per six month growing season to facilitate the availability of fresh produce to our residents. The Garden is open to both residents and non-residents and produce is retained by the individual gardeners.

Polk County

County staff worked to develop a "Healthy Community Checklist" to be used by developers (passively via promotions and community recognition, and actively through valuable development incentives) to encourage them to design future communities for consistency with healthy community design principles. The checklist promotes developments with the best location and the amenities that promote public health and align with the healthy community goals.

"Polk County is pleased to once again be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said Polk County Principal Planner Tom Wodrich, "This recognition is a testament to the continued efforts of the community to commit to living a healthy lifestyle."

City of Lakeland

In late 2014, the city of Lakeland launched a pilot fitness class open to its approximately 1,200 employees as part of its Wellness Program. It started as a pilates class once a week and expanded in 2015 to 13 classes a week offering a variety of activities such as kickboxing, abs & arms, rebounding and group walking in addition to pilates.

"This year the city of Lakeland made tremendous strides toward helping citizens improve the quality of life by providing healthy choices," said Principal Planner Richard Perez. "We are excited that those efforts have not gone unnoticed and we have been named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion."

City of Winter Haven

The city owns a fleet of 12 kayaks which the Natural Resources Division uses to host tours and eco tours of local lakes and rivers. The kayak trips/usage is open to any group in the community at little or no costs.

"Being named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion is a great honor for the city of Winter Haven," said Recreation Superintendent Andy Palmer. "We are committed to making Winter Haven one of the healthiest communities in the state of Florida."

Sarasota County

On October 27, 2015, Food and Nutrition Services hosted their Third Annual Chefs Move to Schools program, in partnership with Farm to Schools program, at a local elementary school. Students, staff, and community members were invited to attend this event which showcases recipes created by local chefs and students in selected schools.

"We are honored to be named a Healthiest Weight Community Champion," said County Administrator Thomas A. Harmer. "We will use this recognition as a springboard to continue to educating the people of Sarasota County on healthy living."

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

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