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NORTHEAST FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2017 HEALTHY WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



Contact:

Communications Office

NewsMedia@flhealth.gov

850-245-4111

Tallahassee, 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.

Bradford County

Bradford County is working to receive future state funding for road and sidewalk projects and has established a process to evaluate county infrastructure, including sidewalks, to ensure Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and to make any necessary repairs.

City of Crescent City

As part of the Keep Putnam Beautiful project, the city of Crescent City was instrumental in leading the first large scale clean-up on May 21, 2016. Across the county, an estimated 500 volunteers collected 9,290 pounds of garbage. In addition, community partners and local volunteers worked together by land and by boat to clean up the St. Johns River and the surrounding areas of Crescent City, Rodman Dam, East Palatka

Trail, Dunn's Creek Bridge and Palatka Riverfront. The total trash collected was 2,860 pounds along the waterways and an additional 375 pounds off St. Johns Avenue.

City of Hampton

The city of Hampton is moving forward with the Rails to Trails project, which involves paving surfaces to allow for more walkability for citizens.

City of Lake Butler

The city of Lake Butler prioritizes maintaining their community's system of parks and network of walking trails. The city aims to implement a program that allows people to rent bicycles to use on Rails to Trails bike paths.

City of Palatka

The city of Palatka has promoted a farmers market at the courthouse for many years and sponsors three community gardens located on city property throughout the core of the city and convenient to neighborhoods. Recently, the city amended its code to allow produce trucks to sell fresh food within the city limits. In addition, bus stops are conveniently located throughout the city that allow citizens to make round trips to local grocery stores and community gardens.

City of Starke

The city of Starke has numerous neighborhood parks that provide physical activity opportunities. The city is also currently planning to implement bike and walking trails.

Columbia County

Columbia County actively promotes a healthier lifestyle for their citizens. The county has 12 miles of walking/hiking trails and partners with the Department of Health in Columbia County to provide and facilitate a local farmer's market for the citizens.

Putnam County

In Putnam County, the Keep Putnam Beautiful Project has placed several community gardens throughout the county. In collaboration with the local Ag Center and the UF-IFAS program, there are two community gardens in schools and one at the Edgar Johnson Senior Center.

Nassau County

Nassau County has adopted numerous programs to encourage healthy eating and physical activity. The Nassau County Extension Office and School Board host the 'Eat Smart, Be Active' class, a series designed to teach participants how to plan healthy snacks and meals, control portions and how to become more physically active.

St. Johns County

In recent years, public transportation providers within St. Johns County have expanded route coverage to offer residents county-wide increased access to major and local retailers offering healthy food options. In addition, farmer's markets around St. Johns County are located within walking distance to bus stops and offer bicycle parking, making these venues highly accessible and affordable to reach.

Town of Brooker

Town of Brooker is applying for a Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) grant and hopes to develop a new park with a playground area and walking trail.

Town of Interlachen

The Interlachen Town Council recently approved funding as part of the town's Better Place Plan to give Hastings Park a much needed facelift to attract more families to visit and participate in physical activity.

Town of Penney Farms

The town of Penney Farms places great emphasis on physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. Outdoor activities are encouraged. There are several walk-a-thons that take place in the town and now an annual 5k race in the fall. The retirement community has a nine-hole golf course available to residents as well as a fitness room and indoor pool. There are many activities that are available such as tai chi, square dancing, line dancing, exercise classes and water aerobics. The retirement community has received the Gold Seal for Excellence from the State of Florida, for seven years in a row.

Town of Pomona Park

The town of Pomona Parks operates a number of facilities and programs for citizens of all ages. The town owns and maintains a swimming area called Middleton Beach, which also has a playground and picnic facilities. The town also owns and maintains the Willard Hazen Ballpark which has three ball fields, a batting practice facility, playgrounds and a fitness trail. Additionally, the Pomona Park Community Center hosts a vibrant senior citizen program which offers chair volleyball and line dancing each week.

Town of Welaka

Excitement and participation in pickle ball continues to grow in the town of Welaka. Pickle ball is a racquet sport that combines elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis. Two local parks have pickle ball courts and the town may add another court. The town is also entertaining the idea of closing 5th and 6th streets for future pickle ball tournaments.

Union County

In Union County, the OJ Phillips Recreation Center serves as the premier location for physical activity offering numerous ball fields and facilities. The county just received a Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) grant to improve the center and attract more local visitors.

About Healthiest Weight Florida

To learn more about Healthiest Weight Florida, please visit www.HealthiestWeightFL.com. A list of the 2017 Champion Communities and best practices can be found online at: 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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