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NORTHWEST FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2017 HEALTHY WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Contact:
Communications Office
NewsMedia@flhealth.gov
850-245-4111

Panama City, 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.

Bay County

Bay County Parks and Recreation has committed funding for the construction of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) inclusive playground for the 2017 Fiscal Year. The playground, aimed at ensuring special-needs children have a safe and fun place to play, will be completed within the coming year at H.G. Harder's Park in Bay County.

City of Apalachicola

The city of Apalachicola has partnered with local vendors to establish the Apalachicola Farmers Market. The market is located at Apalachicola's Mill Pond Pavilion and is open every second and fourth Saturday of the month. The market is a good compliment to Apalachicola's community garden that has been in existence for many years.

City of Panama City

The city of Panama City adopts a Wellness Plan every year in October, approved by the City Commission. The city supports all local nutrition and physical activity events, maintains parks equipped with playgrounds, basketball courts, splash pads and soccer fields and even offers healthy vending machines in several government buildings.

City of Port St. Joe

The city of Port St. Joe has a Gulf ARC transportation organization with an active board that receives federal and state funding and is involved in community engagement. The Gulf ARC provides transportation from low income areas to farmers markets. The city also provides buildings and support for low income food pantries in those areas.

City of Pensacola

The city of Pensacola promotes and supports physical activity for all citizens. The city maintains an inter-local agreement for shared use of recreation facilities with the Escambia County School District, allowing for afterhours public use of the facilities. In addition, the city currently organizes a monthly slow ride where hundreds of bicyclists cruise the streets of Pensacola with the assistance of a police escort. In the next year, the city would like to increase the amount of participants in the monthly slow ride and start an annual Cyclovia event. Cyclovia Open Streets is a day which temporarily closes major city streets to car traffic and converts them to safe and open, car-free environments for families to run, rollerblade, skateboard, bike and play together.

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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