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WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA CELEBRATES 2017 HEALTHY WEIGHT COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS



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Tampa, 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.

City of Bartow

The city of Bartow prioritizes health and wellness in their strategic plan. The plan provides for active maintenance, upkeep and improvements for the more than 70 parks in the greater Bartow area. The parks and recreation department also has a plan to engage citizens in physical activity events including Zumba, yoga, group fitness and bike maintenance classes.

City of Bradenton

The city of Bradenton recognizes the importance of a healthy diet for their citizens. Recently, the city collaborated with several entities to bring a grocery store and other retail businesses to a high priority food desert as defined by the USDA. The city also hosts a weekly farmers market in the downtown core, featuring vendors selling whole,

uncut fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the city permits vendors to sell produce on private or commercial property throughout the city, separately from the weekly farmers market.

City of Brooksville

The city of Brooksville is presently amending its comprehensive plan to include complete streets elements and programs that address the needs of the community for mass transit, pedestrian ways, bicycle paths, roadway capacity and transportation for the disadvantaged. The goal of the city's comprehensive plan future land use element is to ensure that the character, magnitude and location of all land uses provide a system for orderly growth and development that achieves a balanced natural, physical and economic environment and enhances the quality of life of all residents.

City of Clearwater

The city of Clearwater is committed to community wellness. In addition to hosting events and supporting healthy community initiatives, the city offers the Healthy Choices for a Healthy Clearwater program. This program encourages city employees and residents alike to make at least one healthy choice each day. By registering for the program, participants receive discounts with partnering local businesses and a monthly newsletter with health information and local resources for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, the city maintains both an on-road and off-road network of bicycling routes. The city's trail systems connect cyclists to many areas in the city, making it easier to commute throughout the city with a bike. Clearwater has increased the number of bike racks, added bike fix-it stations to high use areas and is looking into more options for water drinking and bottle filling stations.

City of Lakeland

The city of Lakeland's Pathways Plan is a blueprint for the build-out of a network of trails, bike paths and sidewalks throughout the city that connect to destinations such as parks, schools, neighborhoods and commercial centers throughout the metro area. The existing network includes 311 miles of sidewalks, 46 miles of trails, 69 miles of bike lanes and five miles of share the road routes. In addition, the city offers several farmers markets throughout the community and encourages community gardens.

City of Largo

The city of Largo has taken several measures to promote physical activity and healthy nutrition for residents. The city incorporates complete streets approaches to community design, permits mobile fresh produce vending at recreation centers, provides land for community gardens and works to provide safe routes for bicyclists and pedestrians to connect neighborhoods to popular destinations.

City of Mulberry

The city of Mulberry currently offers a free monthly community workout called Fitness in the Park and a monthly farmers market called Market in the Park. In addition, the city is working towards improving local parks by installing new basketball hoops, playground equipment and sidewalks. The city hopes to supplement these healthy offerings in the future with nutrition workshops, more free community workouts and even more sidewalks.

City of New Port Richey

The city of New Port Richey is a gold medal recipient from the Let's Move! City, Towns, and Counties Initiative. The city boasts a newly redesigned downtown park, a recreation and aquatic center, a community garden and several walking trails. In addition, the city has an ordinance that allows residents to grow goods in their front yards and to share that food with neighbors and to sell to the community. The city plans to offer additional free public health and wellness programs in the parks, including group exercise, walks and running events.

City of Pinellas Park

The city of Pinellas Park promotes and supports the physical, emotional and mental development and sustainability of all residents and visitors of the city. There are several fresh produce markets located throughout Pinellas Park that implement federal food assistance programs. These markets are within walking distance of assisted living facilities and safe pathways are available to residents. The city also proudly owns and maintains 17 public park properties. One hundred percent of these facilities offer a variety of recreational and physical fitness amenities. In addition, the city has adopted a multi-year, multi-phase sidewalk program as part of its capital improvement program.

City of Sarasota

The city of Sarasota strives to provide environments conducive to a healthy lifestyle. In fact, the city has a goal that every resident in the region be able to experience a park within a 10 minute walk as well as a goal for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities to be able to move safely along and across streets within the city limits. The city offers a variety of healthy initiatives and programs for the community including fitness competitions, a Safe Routes to Schools Program, four community gardens and a twice-monthly Yoga in the Park event.

City of Venice

The city of Venice has recently been recognized as a Silver Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists for the second time. This award was earned based on the multiple bike/pedestrian enhancements made throughout the city. Multi-use trails and bike lanes provide access to downtown shopping, restaurants, festivals and parks and recreation facilities. The city maintains a system of 37 parks complete with beach access, playgrounds, jogging paths and nature trails.

City of Winter Haven

The city of Winter Haven hosts over 170 special events each year for the community, many of which focus on healthy eating and active living. This includes 10k and 5k races, farmers markets and downtown fitness events. The city recently established a downtown community/co-op garden to provide healthy food to residents. The proceeds from the garden are then donated to provide meals for the needy and homeless. In an effort to provide additional opportunities for the Winter Haven community to be active, the city plans to construct a new tennis complex, multiuse fields, a downtown park and various Complete Streets projects.

Manatee County

The Manatee County Board of County Commissioners recently adopted a resolution proclaiming a culture of health for the organization and the community. The county offers ample opportunities for active living for its citizens through Complete Streets policies, bicycle routes, greenways and an extensive network of parks. In addition, farm stands are located throughout the county and include markets that sell fish, produce, dairy products, herbs, honey, fruits, and vegetables. Manatee County will continue to focus on collaborative ways to engage more residents in healthy lifestyle by focusing on areas that have limited resources and creating innovative ways to meet the needs.

Polk County

Polk County has adopted Complete Streets guidelines into its comprehensive plan and is developing land development regulations to support these guiding policies. In addition, through a partnership called Building a Healthier Polk, the county works with the school board, health practitioners, educators, and community leaders to increase physical activity and reduce chronic illness related to inactivity. Polk County has also partnered with their local Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association to help establish six community gardens over the past four years. This effort brought together public and private sector planners, non-profits and residents to improve nutrition and exercise through gardening in numerous communities throughout Polk County.

Sarasota County

Sarasota County's comprehensive plan supports a built environment that creates healthy lifestyles through a variety of land use types, streets that connect to amenities, a well-connected system of sidewalks, bike paths, trails and similar facilities that encourage physical activity. In addition, there are currently 12 community gardens, 13 farmers markets and several mobile vendors providing fresh produce throughout Sarasota County.

Town of Redington Beach

The town of Redington Beach is only one mile in length. However, the town's four parks provide adult exercise equipment, playgrounds, a soccer field, basketball courts and shuffleboard areas. In the future, the town will work toward attaining the Walk Friendly Community designation, the Gold Medal for Excellence in Parks and a recognition award from the Alliance for Healthy Cities.

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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