

California Cities Helen Putnam Award for Excellence Fontana Takes Steps Toward Healthier Lifestyles

January 2009

In the City of Fontana (population 184,862), a recent study of residents by the San Bernardino County Department of Health reported that 76 percent of adults and 36 percent of youth are either overweight or obese. Of those surveyed, 40 percent do not walk for transportation, fun or exercise. During the 2005–06 school year, only 22 percent of Fontana’s 5th, 7th and 9th graders met all six California Department of Education school fitness standards.

In response, the city created the Healthy Fontana program to combat the growing epidemic. With the support of the mayor and city council, Mayor Pro Tem Acquanetta Warren challenged the community to become fit and active. “This program began as a way to proactively educate and challenge our Fontana community to become fit,” says Warren.

The Healthy Fontana program is working to create an active and livable community that helps residents understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Healthy Fontana has four major components: Nutrition and Smart Choices, Active Living and Exercise, Smart Growth and Development, and Community Partnerships and Working Together.

Learning to Make Smart Food Choices

The nutrition component teaches residents how to lead healthy lives in ways that are both convenient and economical. A Fast, Fresh and Fabulous Cooking Class promotes the importance of eating five to nine servings of fruit and vegetables daily. Participants learn new ways to prepare healthy meals with ingredients that are readily available in neighborhood markets.

The office of County Supervisor Paul A. Biane established an annual Health and Safety Fair in June 2008. This event evaluates each participant’s overall fitness and includes different types of health screenings. Healthy Fontana and the city play an active role in this event, from planning to promotion and participation.

Through a grant funded by the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health, a Step Out to Wellness program encouraged employees to exercise and consume fruit and vegetables every day. Employees tracked their daily food intake and physical activity and had access to cooking classes, stress management resources, massages and information on stability training and ergonomics.

Boosting Activity Levels

Step Out to Wellness also issued a fitness challenge that involved nine different municipal departments competing against each other in volleyball, basketball, floor hockey, golf and more. Angelica Baltazar, Healthy Communities program coordinator for the county Department of Public Health, says, “Healthy Fontana has excelled in creating a community that promotes an active lifestyle --- truly making it a healthy place to live, work and play.” More than 250 employees participated in the program. As a result, many departments started their own fitness and nutritional programs.

Through a partnership with a local fitness club, Healthy Fontana offers an affordable Health and Fitness Boot Camp for residents. Designed to encourage people to focus on health and fitness, the boot camp has become popular among residents and city employees, increasing enrollment by 75 percent since its launch in June 2007.

“For many in our community, Healthy Fontana is much more than a program,” says Mayor Mark Nuaimi, who is an active participant. “It represents a new lease on life.”

The Healthy Fontana program is reaching out to different age groups to promote physical activity throughout the city. The Smart Kids after-school program has incorporated a Healthy Fontana hour, during which more than 1,800 kids at 22 different sites are involved in physical activities.

As a result, two local elementary schools have approached Healthy Fontana to help them start walking programs for students and faculty.

Shaping the Community

Healthy Fontana’s Smart Growth-Development component focuses on the development of mixed-use communities that combine business, residential and social areas to improve community connectivity and walkability. In summer 2008, Healthy Fontana offered the first of a series of workshops that included city and school planners, police management, economic development staff, planning commissioners, city council members and local developers. The workshops focused on smart growth concepts and walkable communities.

“Healthy Fontana is a philosophy that pervades everything we do, from community programs to community design,” says City Manager Ken Hunt. “We take pride in making healthy choices that will benefit the entire community.”

Healthy Fontana staff also plays an active role in the Development Advisory Board, composed of several city departments and community organizations. The board is designed to bring the smart growth, connectivity and walkability concepts to new development and redevelopment within the city. Discussions are under way to devise ways to improve walkability by requesting that developers build wider sidewalks, establish trails and, when possible, assist with completing segments of the 21-mile Pacific Electric Trail, which follows an abandoned railway corridor that runs through Fontana.

Future Healthy Fontana projects include a safe route to school program, new parks, developing a trail connecting homes with workplaces and expanding the senior transportation program.

Working With Community Partners to Build Awareness

Healthy Fontana's fourth component involves building strong partnerships with community organizations. To highlight Heart Awareness Month in February 2008, Healthy Fontana partnered with San Antonio Community Hospital to provide heart awareness and educational materials, promotional items and a monetary donation for the cooking class. In addition, staff worked with the hospital to expand a community lecture series about cardiac health.

Due to the overwhelming popularity of the departmental fitness challenges, Healthy Fontana is using part of a recent \$10,000 grant from Kaiser Permanente as continual funding for the monthly events and to encourage other businesses in the community to start their own employee health and wellness programs.

The Healthy Fontana program and its partners are committed to changing the face of the local obesity and diabetes epidemic by providing residents with a healthy, walkable community and programs that enrich their quality of life.

Contact: Frances Hernandez, community services manager, Community Services Department; phone: (909) 428-8360, ext. 225; e-mail: fhernandez@fontana.org.