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EVENT CALENDAR

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MEDIA NOTE: This year's report is available for viewing on www.countyhealthrankings.org

2013 report released on Sarasota County health ranking underscores community partnerships

Today, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and University of Wisconsin released the 2013 County Health Rankings and Roadmaps tool, which rank counties across the nation on health outcomes and health behaviors. This is the fourth in a series of annual reports that uses traditional, established data, much of which was obtained from the Florida Department of Health (DOH) and is available to the people of Florida at www.floridacharts.com.

The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County recognizes the value in measuring health outcomes, which serves as a snapshot of the health of individuals in our county. The County Health Rankings report reinforces how we all have a stake in the health of our community, and how important it is to work with a variety of community partners in creating and sustaining programs that demonstrate good outcomes if we want to stay healthy as a community.

"In Sarasota County, there are areas of progress and continuing opportunity," says Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) Director Kari Ellingstad. "We continue to rank among the top five of Florida's 67 counties overall, which reflects the priority that our community has placed on healthy environments and healthy lifestyles. Placing continued emphasis on the quality of its parks and recreation facilities, and in helping to improve access to quality health care, including preventive screenings for diabetes and breast cancer, helps to improve the health of our community."

"The Florida Department of Health, through its county health departments, works every day to bring together community partners around shared goals to improve health," said Dr. John Armstrong, Florida Surgeon General and Secretary of Health. "As we track our progress, we are reminded there is no finish line in our efforts for better health."

Some examples of locally developed partnerships that have helped leverage support to address pressing health issues in Sarasota County follow:

"A year-long collaboration among leaders from Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Sarasota County Health Department, Senior Friendship Centers and Sarasota County government – with support from The Patterson Foundation – to improve the system of care for Sarasota's uninsured and underinsured has yielded significant progress, including building technology infrastructure that will aid in information sharing among the providers and standardized eligibility requirement for patients to help minimize their wait time for medical services," said Michael Corley, senior consultant of The Patterson Foundation.

The recent launch of the Healthy Sarasota County brand serves as a catalyst to engage child care centers, schools, medical facilities and work sites to work collaboratively to address a range of issues that impact health, including tobacco use and the goal of achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

Janet Kahn, executive director for the Early Learning Coalition, remarked: "It's exciting to see families with young children beginning to embrace this new culture, which encourages healthy choices using a proven message --5-2-1-0-- that

promotes 5 fruits/vegetables daily; 2 – no more than two hours of screen time daily; 1 hour of physical activity daily; and 0 sugary or sports drinks including Gatorade.”

Born out of a desire to make walking paths safe and accessible, Pathways to Health have been established in neighborhoods, at churches and at over a dozen schools in the county. Ashton Elementary School Principal Chris Renouf, formerly principal of Toledo Blade Elementary School in North Port, spoke with Pathways to Health organizers last year about the changes he saw on his former campus after the paths were created.

“The walking path signs at Toledo Blade have generated such interest and positive buzz on campus among the students, their families and our staff,” Renouf said. “It’s amazing and not uncommon to see kids of all ages huddled around the signs pointing to and discussing walking routes, and distances. Parents also are asking health-related questions and staff is inquiring about pedometers. Additionally, the campus has adopted a Smoke Free status. Not only do the signs look awesome, but they are truly useful and reinforce the message that at our school, we are ‘Soaring to New Heights’ to adopt healthy living.”

Venice Area Chamber of Commerce President John Ryan stated: “As ‘Tobacco-Free Campus’ initiatives have expanded to area businesses, we wanted to show our commitment to promoting a healthy environment for chamber visitors and staff. With support from the Tobacco Free Partnership of Sarasota County, we have taken steps to become a ‘Tobacco Free Campus’ and to receive the ‘Healthy Sarasota County’ work site designation. The Venice Area Chamber shares property with Venice Regional Medical Center so this initiative expands their existing ‘Tobacco Free Campus’ status.”

“We recognize that health is everyone’s business. Working together, we can make Sarasota County a healthier place to live, work and play,” said County Administrator Randall Reid. “The County Health Rankings provide our community with tools and guidance on ways we can take action to further improve health. With this knowledge, we as a community can take steps to continue to work toward creating a healthier Sarasota County.”

For more information about the county health rankings, visit www.countyhealthrankings.org.

