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Southern Lorain County is finding ways to THRIVE!

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Interim village manager Mark Rosemark and Main Street Wellington director Jenny Arntz lay out the ways that THRIVE! is already helping Wellington and surrounding areas.



Photos by Jonathan Delozier | Wellington Enterprise THRIVE! Southern Lorain County will aim to give residents better access to options for healthier eating and fitness through park improvements, more fruits and vegetables in vending machines and markets, and exercise classes.

When you see an “exercise desert,” the best solution is to build an oasis.

The United Way of Greater Lorain County and the YMCA of greater Cleveland have partnered with 16 other organizations to form THRIVE! Southern Lorain County.

The collaborative effort will aim to give residents an easier path to healthy living in what they call an ‘exercise desert’ — or a large area where lack of reasonable access to fitness and nutrition has led to an epidemic of related health problems.

According to the United Way, 69 percent of southern Lorain County residents are obese and 24 percent are smokers — which falls above the county average on both fronts.

Poverty rates in the area also fall in line with the poorest urban areas of the country.

An initial three-year grant of \$82,000 per year from the United Way will fund the project.

“I live in southern Lorain County and I can say that we have the same problems that everyone else has,” said United Way of Greater Lorain County executive director Bill Harper. “We don’t necessarily eat right, exercise, or take care of ourselves. The truth of the matter is preventable health issues are caused by these decisions that we make. This group is standing up and doing something about it.”

THRIVE! will cover Wellington village and township, Rochester village and township, Pittsfield Township, Huntington Township, Camden Township, Brighton Township, and Kipton.

In addition to the United Way and YMCA, collaborative partners include First Congregational Church of Wellington, First United Methodist Church of Wellington, Huntington Township, Inner Circle Personal Fitness, Lansman's Shape Shop, LCCC, Lorain County General Health District, Lorain County Metro Parks, Main Street Wellington, Mercy Allen Hospital, Oberlin Community Services, Rochester Township, Wellington Kiwanis Club, Wellington Salvation Army, the village of Wellington, and Well-Help.

Some healthy initiatives are already being enacted by the group such as enhancing the Wellington Farmer's Market, fresh fruits and vegetables at corner stores, and public cooking demonstrations. Fitness will be emphasized by improving walking paths and putting out strong healthy living messages at annual events.

Future strategies include highlighting heart-healthy options at restaurants, adding more nutritious options to vending machines, and hosting exercise classes at community events.

"As a group we can utilize all of our resources, gather information, and broadcast what we're doing," said Main Street Wellington director Jenny Arntz. "I went to Brighton Township and presented THRIVE! to them. I found out that they wanted to make a small walking path. I told them that's something we might be able to help with. There is money from the Lorain County General Health District that can go toward that. Without the kind of contact that we're creating here, I wouldn't have known that and neither would Brighton."

Wellington interim village manager Mark Rosemark highlighted the ways that THRIVE! is already helping his community.

"The village has benefited already from this group's efforts in the form of new bike racks at our rec park," he said. "It's a matter of enticing people to use the park and to get there on bikes instead of automobiles. We will soon have a watering station installed at the park as well."

THRIVE! is the 10th community collaborative launched by United Way in Lorain County.

Work over the past year helped the local United Way receive recognition as the 2016 Ohio United Way of the Year.

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