

Michigan Public Health Week 2006 Hometown Health Heroes

City of Kalamazoo – Department of Parks and Recreation

For its commitment to helping the city of Kalamazoo plan for future development with physical activity in mind, the City of Kalamazoo Department of Parks and Recreation is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Thanks to the Department's leadership, a number of changes have taken place in Kalamazoo to make the city a safer, healthy place. Improvements such as readily accessible bike racks downtown, walking paths, an all season park with non-motorized trails, and a playground designed for children of all physical capabilities offer Kalamazoo residents opportunities to be physically active. This summer, the city will undergo a major project that focuses on walking trails, new basketball courts, t-ball fields, and a new skateboard park.

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City of Vassar – Tuscola County

For its extensive advocacy and leadership in making all of its parks and recreational areas smoke-free, the City of Vassar is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Vassar's newly amended city policy was adopted in 2005 and allows city residents, both children and adults, to enjoy physical activity and relaxation in a healthy, smoke-free environment within the city's parks and recreational areas. Even the city's walking trails are now designated off-limits for smoking. The adoption of the new policy was a collaborative effort between the City of Vassar and the Tuscola County Safe Communities coalition.

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Dial Help, Inc. – Project STARR

Houghton, Keweenaw, Ontonagon and Baraga Counties

For its commitment and dedication to preventing sexual violence and for the many youth it has educated and inspired, Dial Help's Project STARR (Students Talking About Responsible Relationships) is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Since its inception in 1996, Project STARR has partnered with schools in Houghton, Keweenaw, Ontonagon, and Baraga Counties to help middle and high school-age youth develop skills to prevent sexual violence perpetration and victimization. In addition to providing resources to parents and school staff, the program also works with key community leaders to build communities that do not tolerate sexual violence.

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Earth Works Garden – Detroit

For its efforts to educate youth and increase access to fresh produce, Earth Works Garden of Detroit is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The Earth Works Garden started in 1999 as a partnership between the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Gleaners Community Food Bank. The garden started as a small plot of land in the inner city of Detroit and has grown to 3/4 of an acre on three plots near the Meldrum Street Soup Kitchen. Complete with a greenhouse, the program's primary goal is to educate local youth through hands-on projects in the area of nutrition/cooking, organic agriculture, and the importance of diversity both socially and environmentally. The project also yields fresh produce to benefit such programs as WIC and Soup Kitchen guests.

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Genesee County

For numerous initiatives to improve the health and safety of its residents, Genesee County is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero. Several exemplary programs are being honored, including:

Bendle Public Schools adopted a 24/7 tobacco-free school policy to protect all students, staff, parents, and visitors from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. The 24/7 tobacco-free school policy prohibits tobacco use at all times in school buildings, property, and at all on-and off campus school sponsored events, including all athletic and extramural events. This policy has the potential to prevent youth tobacco use and can encourage youth and adult smokers to quit by changing the social norm about tobacco use, specifically by demonstrating that most people do not use tobacco and decreasing the acceptability of tobacco use among youth. The Bendle Public School District has also completed the *Healthy School Action Tool*, demonstrating its commitment to assessing the needs of students and staff to improve health behaviors.

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Bridges to the Future is a community collaboration between various schools, organizations, and volunteers that provides a before-and-after school program to over 5,000 students in grades K-9 in 30 Flint-area schools. The program builds positive assets and promotes youth development through academics, social, and cultural enrichment, including fitness & nutrition activities. A particularly noteworthy program is the ***Bridges Running and Fitness Club*** at the ***Durant - Tuuri - Mott Elementary School in Flint***. In October 2004, the club ran with Michigan's First Gentleman in the Detroit Free Press Marathon.

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The Genesee County Childhood Asthma Task Force provides disease management services to children age 19 and younger who have a diagnosis of severe-persistent and moderate-persistent asthma under the care of the Hurley Child and Adolescent Asthma Center at the Hurley Medical Center. In addition to its educational and assessment activities, the CATF also provides an assessment of indoor environmental exposures that trigger asthma and a plan to control asthma triggers. The Task Force also runs a day camp for children with asthma as well as an asthma support group for teens.

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The Haskell Community Center is a safe haven for seniors and youth on Flint's northwest side. In addition to a kids' café that provides after-school snacks before tutoring sessions, the center has a playground, tennis courts, and a basketball court and is easily accessible to nearby neighborhoods by walking and biking.

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The Industrial Mutual Association (IMA) Children's Recreation Fund focuses on providing recreational opportunities for children in Flint and Genesee County that include summer baseball leagues, a drop-in youth program at a local community center, one-day athletic clinics, and a wide range of other healthy, stimulating, recreational activities for children and adults in the community.

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Washington Elementary School formed a Safe Routes to School team and surveyed students in grades 3-5 and their parents about commuting to school as part of Michigan's two-year pilot Safe Routes to School initiative in 2004 and 2005. The team conducted a walking audit on commonly used routes to school and identified barriers to safety, such as loose dogs, abandoned buildings and damaged sidewalks. To further address safety, Mott Community College agreed to include Washington School in its daily patrols, particularly during drop off and pick up times. School Principal Maria Hope encourages parents and neighbors to call Mott 24 hours a day with safety concerns.

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Hale Area Schools – Ogemaw County

For recognizing the importance of physical activity and constructing walking paths on elementary school grounds, Hale Area Schools is being honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Last fall, Hale Area Schools was awarded a \$15,000 grant by the Michigan Department of Community Health to construct two walking paths on elementary school grounds. The District's Coordinated School Health (CSH) Team – led by Michelle Kalafut of St. Joseph's Health Systems, Principal Robin Andress, and school registered nurse Edie Hoyle – advocated for an enhanced fitness environment. The CSH team worked with Hodgins Asphalt Paving to design a walking path and a larger path for running. The construction of the walking paths prompted the CSH committee to begin a Walking Club and also an after school walking group. The paths are also available to community members when school is not in session.

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Henry North Elementary School – Lansing

For demonstrating its dedication to a healthy student body by starting a community garden, the Henry North Elementary School is being honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The North School Children's Garden is a service-learning project that involves students in all phases of the gardening process. Vegetables, herbs, flowers, and some fruit and nut trees are grown. Fresh produce from the garden is shared with the students and their families. Produce is also donated to a local food bank and the Salvation Army to help fight hunger and to a senior center to provide nutritious meals to senior citizens. Students develop skills that can be applied throughout their lives. These skills include planning, budgeting, problem solving, teamwork, awareness of nutrition, and concern for others. By taking responsibility for plants and helping others to fight hunger, students establish a positive role in their community and bolster their sense of self-worth.

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Kingston Community School District – Tuscola County

For demonstrating its dedication to a healthier community by adopting a 24/7 tobacco-free school policy in January 2006 for all schools in the district, Kingston Community School District is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The new policy protects all students in K-12, school staff, parents, and other community members that attend, work in, and visit Kingston schools from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. The policy, which has the potential to prevent youth tobacco use and encourage youth and adult smokers to quit, prohibits tobacco use at all times in school buildings, property, and at all on-and off-campus school sponsored events, including all athletic and extramural events. The adoption of this policy involved collaboration between the Kingston School District and the Tuscola Safe Communities Coalition.

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Lakeview High School – Battle Creek

For making student health a top priority and increasing access to healthy food and beverages for students, Lakeview High School (LHS) is being honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

LHS adopted the Michigan State Board of Education Policy on Healthy Food and Beverages and over a two year period targeted its implementation on the snacks sold within the food service program. In the first year alone, \$20,000 fewer baked goods were purchased. The LHS student senate adopted a policy to prohibit carbonated beverages from being sold during the school day and menu selections now have a healthy entrée featured as one of the three selections offered daily.

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Marquette County Health Department – “Youth for Truth”

For its dedication to engaging youth in the Upper Peninsula in a campaign to prevent youth tobacco use and increase community awareness about the harmful effects of smoking and second-hand smoke, the Marquette County Health Department’s “Youth for Truth” campaign is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The campaign is associated with a 28% reduction in youth smoking after the first two years of implementation. As a result of tireless efforts to promote the campaign, Marquette has also become one of eleven Michigan counties to adopt a smoke-free public places and work sites regulation, which protects thousands of Marquette county residents from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke where they live, work, and play. The regulatory effort was accomplished through collaboration between the Marquette County Tobacco-Free Community Coalition and other local agencies, partners, and the Michigan Department of Community Health, Tobacco Section.

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Mixed Greens – Grand Rapids

For inspiring, sustaining, and supporting a legacy of fresh foods and gardens, Mixed Greens of Grand Rapids is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Mixed Greens also partners with the community to create, promote, and support schoolyard gardens and kitchen classroom programming. Using mobile, raised-bed vegetable gardens, kids learn basic horticultural practices and environmental stewardship by growing a wide range of delicious, nutritious food. The vegetables from the garden, supplemented by produce from local farms, are offered to the students so they may gain experience with new foods. Coupled with a field trip to local farms, the children learn about local agriculture while expanding their knowledge about vegetables.

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Okemos Public Schools – “Clean Air Program for School Buses Plus”

For recognizing the importance of reducing students’ exposure to diesel exhaust and addressing school bus emissions, the Okemos Public Schools (OPS) “Cleaner Air Program for School Buses Plus” is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

OPS’s leadership efforts resulted in a successful public-private partnership and created the opportunity to receive a competitive grant through the EPA Clean School Bus USA program. In 2004, grant funds were used to purchase 78 retrofit technologies for OPS and ten other school districts in the mid-Michigan regions. In 2006, OPS was awarded another EPA Clean School Bus USA grant to retrofit an additional 283 buses in school districts located in 25 counties that were not meeting national standards for certain air pollutants. Due to OPS’s leadership, EPA has made this program a national case study to help other school districts that are interested in the Clean School Bus USA program.

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Safe Kids Lakeshore – Holland

For its leadership in working to prevent accidental injuries to children age 14 and under, Safe Kids Lakeshore is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The coalition reaches out to the community in all areas of safety including water, bicycle, home, sport, equestrian, and child passenger safety. Through its Child Safety Seat Inspection Station, Safe Kids Lakeshore provides car seat checks and free or reduced cost car seats to low-income and minority families in need. The Bike Safety Team distributed more than 1,000 free bike helmets and educational materials to families in need. The coalition works with community partners such as the Zeeland Policy department, Ottawa County Sheriff’s Department, the Grand Rapids Griffins, Kohl’s Cares for Kids program, local townships, local health departments, Holland Community Hospital, Head Start, Boys and Girls Club of Holland and many other organizations. DeVos Children’s Hospital serves as the lead agency.

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Safe Kids Marquette-Alger Counties

For its dedication to promoting childhood safety, training, and distributing safety devices to families in Marquette and Alger County, Safe Kids Marquette-Alger Counties is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Since 1996, Safe Kids Marquette-Alger has worked in the areas of child passenger safety, bicycle, firearm, and fire safety. The lead agency for this chapter, Marquette County Sheriff’s office, was awarded a \$100,000 grant in 2005 and 2006 to provide support for child passenger safety efforts through the Upper Peninsula. The program has also received funding from AAA Michigan, State Farm Insurance, Safe Kids Worldwide, Michigan Department of Community Health and the Office of Highway Safety Planning to fund public educational events, training, and car seat checks and distribution. Partner organizations for this chapter include the Marquette county health department, city police department, Marquette General Health System and the Munising and Negaunee State Police posts.

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Safe Kids Muskegon County

For its commitment to protecting children from unintentional injury through implementation of model injury prevention programs, educational activities, and multi-agency cooperation, Safe Kids of Muskegon (SKM) is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The SKM program was launched in spring of 2000 to educate residents and prevent injuries and deaths from auto accidents, bicycle accidents, water emergencies and fires. The program focuses on educating parents, caregivers and children about behavioral modifications to prevent needless tragedies. SKM also distributes safety devices (car seats, bike helmets, smoke detectors, etc.) as a primary strategy to help keep kids safe. SKM collaborates with health and safety organizations to promote child safety in Muskegon County, including the Muskegon area police and fire departments, hospitals, county health department, Red Cross, and Med Team Ambulance.

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Safe Kids Van Buren County

For its dedication to educating and preventing injury and death among children, Safe Kids Van Buren County is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

Safe Kids Van Buren County has worked tirelessly to promote the health and safety of children by participating in local school health fairs, promoting bike and bike helmet safety in schools and summer camps, and offering a bi-lingual bike safety program to children in a migrant summer program. The program also focuses on booster seat education and child passenger safety and partners with local schools, MSU Extension, the local health department, Michigan State Police, the local Sheriff's Department, Head Start, and many other organizations to provide fun and engaging educational activities for children and adults.

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Washtenaw County

For its dedication to promoting long-term health improvement in the areas of physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco use reduction through environmental and policy change, Washtenaw County is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is partnering with five communities (Saline, Chelsea, Manchester, Dexter and Ypsilanti) to promote long-term health improvement in the areas of physical activity, healthy eating and tobacco use reduction through environmental and policy changes. Each community has an established health coalition that has demonstrated need and capacity to implement policy and environmental change. By creating a healthier environment, Washtenaw County hopes to see decreased cardiovascular disease and death in the future.

Additional programs demonstrating a commitment to improving the health of children in Washtenaw County community include, but are not limited to: Safe Kids Washtenaw County's car seat and bike helmet distribution programs, the Corner Teen Health Center, and the Washtenaw Asthma Coalition.

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Women's Resource Center of Northern Michigan – Petoskey

For its success in creating a school-based sexual violence prevention program to reach youth, parents, school staff, and key community leaders in northern Michigan, the Women's Resource Center of Northern Michigan is honored as a 2006 Hometown Health Hero.

The Center has developed a gender-specific curriculum for youth to raise awareness about sexual violence and how to prevent it. The program students in grades 9 and 10 in 17 area high schools throughout five counties in northwest lower Michigan. The program also includes school/community involvement and family-based activities to heighten awareness and increase skills to deal with this important issue.

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