

TEXAS BRINGING HEALTHY BACK: GROWING COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among Texas children and adults is higher than the national average, and continues to increase – nearly one in three Texans are obese. This epidemic places significant strain on the health and economic vitality of the state. In 2001, direct and indirect costs associated with overweight and obesity in Texas adults totaled \$10.5 billion. In October of 2000, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Program (NPAOP) received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support nutrition and physical activity programs to prevent obesity and related chronic diseases in Texas. The Statewide Obesity Taskforce was created as a result of this funding. The taskforce developed an initial Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Obesity in Texas in 2001. In 2003, the CDC renewed funding to the DSHS to support continued efforts to reduce obesity as well as revision of the strategic plan. The strategic plan was revised in 2004, and Texas successfully competed for additional CDC funding from 2009-2014. Texas was one of only 23 states to be awarded. In implementing the strategic plan, the DSHS has been reaching out across the state to help enact policy and environmental changes that will reshape communities to support and transform the health and well-being of Texas residents.

To help educate and inspire communities into action, the DSHS has developed a communications initiative called “Growing Community,” which highlights successful community-based change strategies across the state through short video clips. The videos were first unveiled by NPAOP at its statewide Obesity Summit, where they received an overwhelmingly positive response. The videos have initially been distributed within six Texas communities, where recipients are acting as “catalysts for change” by hosting video screenings. “Growing Community” has already begun to inspire additional policy and environmental changes in these communities.

This collection of case studies will describe four of the examples featured in the video series in further detail. To learn more about the obesity prevention efforts of the DSHS and view other examples of promising practices please visit the DSHS website at:

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/GrowingCommunity/default.shtm>



INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/GrowingCommunity/PhysActEnglish.shtm> (English)

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/PhysActSpanish.shtm> (Español)



Dallas, Texas is a bustling metropolis about two and a half hours northwest of the rural east Texas town of Henderson. Despite one being a rural town and the other being a major city, residents of both communities were struggling with a similar problem – increasing opportunities for physical activity.

The traffic volume and congestion in Dallas, coupled with a lack of sidewalks along streets, make pedestrian travel and recreation inefficient and dangerous. In 2002, a group of citizens and organizations joined together to create the Friends of the Trinity Strand Trail, a non-profit organization focused on creating a city-wide plan to connect all of the trails in the Dallas trail system to allow people to travel from one side of the city to the other without intersecting traffic. Their vision is to tap into some existing natural resources and tie commercial, residential, and recreational areas together with easy access to public transportation. Since their inception, the Friends of the Trinity Strand Trail have raised over 12 million dollars in public and private funds for their project.

The proposed Trinity Strand Trail will be a nearly eight mile hike, bike, commuter, and recreational trail that will run along the original path of the Trinity River, which flows through the heart of the Dallas Design District. The Strand will connect the Katy Trail to the Trinity River Levee Trail and the entire Trinity River Greenbelt – uniting many Dallas neighborhoods and offering residents commuter access to business districts, while simultaneously providing recreational benefits. As is to be expected whenever undertaking construction in large cities, the trail design has encountered significant engineering challenges as the city begins outgrowing its space. That is why retrofitting has been such a crucial element of success for this project. The trail has been designed to fit the contours of the existing infrastructure in Dallas, running under highways when necessary to avoid disrupting the flow of either pedestrian or vehicular transportation.

During the 1990s Henderson, Texas was battling with a lean city budget. Struggling to maintain even essential services, parks and recreation facilities were pushed to the side. In 2000, the town began to experience a substantial economic turnaround, which enabled local policymakers to start focusing on expanding social services. In order to determine what types of services were of primary concern to residents, the city distributed a survey in county water bill statements. The top community priority was the development of a neighborhood trail system. In response to overwhelming citizen input, the town developed a 10 year master park plan.

The parks department was able to tap into resources from diverse sources to start implementing the plan. In addition to benefiting from city funds generated by sales taxes, the city received a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which provides park development grants to match 50 percent of local contributions. The city also needed access to land to build these paths. Instead of purchasing land for new development, the town leveraged an existing – yet neglected – resource in Fair Park. Town officials coordinated a “land swap” with a private landowner for land near the park, in exchange for city-owned land elsewhere in Henderson. The local parks department was able to count this land as an in-kind contribution toward its matched funding grant with the Parks and Wildlife Department. These creative funding solutions have been successful in making it possible to build several miles of paths, which the city intends will be the beginning of a more extensive network that will be completed in phases. The initial

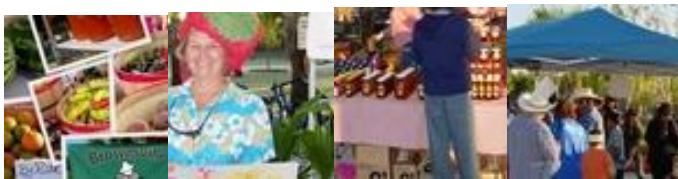
park trails were completed as part of phase one; phase two expanded trails into the nearby wooded area; and phase three will introduce playground equipment as well as an authentic skate park (area youth currently utilize a local tennis court as a skating venue).

In addition to support from local policymakers, citizen buy-in and active involvement helped make the vision of improved infrastructure for physical activity and recreation in Henderson a reality. Concerned residents joined together to form the LEAN (Leadership Encouraging Health and Nutrition) coalition, in which members worked together for one vision and one purpose—creating a place and an environment supportive of healthy lifestyles.

INCREASING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/FruitsVeggiesEnglish.shtm> (English)

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/FruitsVeggiesSpanish.shtm> (Español)



Brownsville, Texas, is a border town in Cameron County in the Rio Grande Valley. This predominately Latino community suffers from twice the national average of diabetes, a co-morbidity of obesity. Analysis found that 52.2 percent of Cameron County adults are considered obese compared to the national average of 28 percent. The area also showed 27 percent of adolescents, particularly boys, are obese compared with 16 percent nationally. In 2002, The U.S.-Mexico Border Diabetes Prevention and Control Project noted diabetes as the fourth leading cause of death among Latinos in Texas. Despite being a predominantly agricultural community, fresh fruits and vegetables were not readily available in Brownsville— especially for low-income community members. The realization that the town was lacking a place where reasonably priced, fresh produce could be easily accessible to all gave rise to the idea of starting a local farmers' market.

From this awareness and the growing popularity of farmers' markets in the United States, faculty from The University of Texas School of Public Health at Brownsville and staff from the Department of State Health Services joined efforts to begin exploring the possibility of opening a local farmers' market. This small group began to spread the word to others within the community and in a short period of time, the farmers' market meetings grew to include community physicians, nonprofit employees, agricultural extension offices, USDA grant recipients for farmers' market initiatives, local church groups, writers, government staff, farmers, and other interested community members. As interest continued to grow, the group organized and began a strategic plan to research the different aspects of the project. . These interested individuals formed subcommittees which researched and combined efforts to investigate possible location sites, gauge the interest and needs of local farmers, determine consumer interest, and learn the technical and business aspects involved in creating a successful market.

During the investigative process, the committee formalized their main goals and interests in a farmers' market. The mission of the Brownsville Farmers' Market is twofold: to create an environment where fresh, affordable and Texas grown produce is available to local families which will improve their health and well-being, while providing local farmers with an outlet to sell their produce and increase their earnings. In addition to these benefits for producers and the consumers, both are able to engage in an interactive relationship, consumers learning about where their produce comes from and trying new foods and the producers being able to take on the role of educator, sharing their knowledge with the consumers.

The committee was able to take advantage of a state grant from DSHS NPAOP geared at helping communities address obesity to garner the initial funds to implement the Del Campo a Su Mesa (from the fields to your table) Farmers' Market. The market was designed with the explicit intent of decreasing obesity rates and reducing diabetes rates. A primary goal of the Brownsville Farmers' Market is to attract people from different economic, cultural, social backgrounds. To help achieve this goal, Su Clinica Familiar – a community health care facility – provides a voucher system, funded through a grant from DSHS NPAOP, to allow low-income families to receive \$10 in vouchers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. The Brownsville market is currently in the final phase of achieving certification as a state-recognized farmers' market, a designation that will allow residents to use food stamps and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) cards to purchase fresh produce. The market was wildly successful in its first year with 20 booths selling in-season vegetables and fruits, farm-fresh eggs, honey, homemade breads and jams, fresh-caught Gulf shrimp, and herbs. The market also provides consumers with health and nutritional information such as recipe cards, brochures, health screenings, cooking demonstrations by local chefs and residents, cookbook authors, and others. In addition to providing access to healthy nutrition options, the market offers the opportunity to participate in physical activity as well. Located along Brownsville's Linear Park's walking trail, the market serves as a venue for shoppers to walk or ride bicycles as they browse vendor's merchandise. Students studying kinesiology at The University of Texas School of Education Department of Health & Human Performance also provide physical activity for children while parents shop.

To help sustain the progress in its second year, the market was able to secure \$45,881 in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as part of the Know Your Farmer, Know your Food initiative. Also known as the 2009 Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), the initiative awarded 86 grants totaling more than \$4.5 million to communities throughout the nation. These projects help increase access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers using funds provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The grants are designed to help continue expansion of farmers' markets across the country to increase access to locally grown foods for consumers, and increase incomes for farmers. Funds are to be used to establish, expand, and promote farmers' markets and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities. Su Clinica also received additional funds from DSHS NPAOP to use in 2011 to expand outreach to the Colonias which are communities along the Texas-Mexico border that lack basic necessities like paved roads and running water. They will be looking into providing transportation to/from the market and implementing a brown bag program (delivering produce) for those in need who do not have access.

The vision of the Del Campo a Su Mesa Farmers' Market is to promote policy and environmental changes that make healthy foods and active lifestyles an easy choice for all families in Brownsville. By bringing together a wide array of constituents and tapping into a variety of resources, the community was able to establish a sustainable model in route to creating broad change throughout the town.

DECREASING SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/SugarBevsEnglish.shtm> (English)

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/SugarBevsSpanish.shtm> (Español)



United States Automobile Association (USAA) is the choice company providing financial products and services to the U.S. military and their families. Located in San Antonio, Texas, it is a city within itself with between 16,000 - 17, 000 employees and contractors on site on a daily basis. When USAA officials started

noticing that healthcare expenses were escalating, they noted that employee weight was increasing as well. So company officials decided to take action to reverse the trend. USAA implemented the Take Care of Your Health program to address a variety of health issues through more than 20 different workplace initiatives including: on-site health clinics, fitness centers and personal trainers, smoking cessation and weight management programs, and healthy food choices available in the cafeterias and vending machines. In 2005, 68.5 percent of the company's employees participated in at least one of these wellness programs. USAA also relies on a coordinated internal communications effort to spread anecdotes about successful employees to encourage participation.

The substantial amount of time people spend in the workplace makes it an opportune place to make healthy changes. Sugar-sweetened beverages are the largest single source of calories in the American diet, and USAA became aware that there was a high consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among employees at work. The company took steps to discourage people from drinking sugar-sweetened beverages by changing the price structure of the beverage offered in the workplace. USAA worked with its food and beverage vendor to change the prices of drinks in on-site vending machines by slightly increasing the price of sugar-sweetened beverages and significantly decreasing the price of unsweetened beverages. With this alternative, revenue remains constant while non-sugar beverage consumption increased. Additionally, USAA instructed the vendor to change product placement, repositioning healthy foods and beverages at eye level, and moving less healthy options towards the bottom rows of the vending machine. These types of simple no-cost or cost-neutral solutions can have a large impact on consumption patterns. USAA has also worked to make water more readily available by adding more water fountains on site.

To measure the savings produced by its health promotion programs, USAA aggressively tracks employee population level health data. While USAA has not determined savings for all of its programs, they have reduced workplace absences and produced an estimated three-year savings of more than \$105 million.

USAA has adopted a culture of health and wellness promotion in its workplace. Company management has integrated primary prevention into USAA's benefits strategy in an effort to cultivate a more productive workforce and lower healthcare costs. In turn, USAA is reaping an overall positive return on its investment – maximizing employee health and quality of life while conserving company resources.

DECREASING HIGH-ENERGY-DENSE FOODS

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/DenseFoodsEnglish.shtm> (English)

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/obesity/growingcommunity/DenseFoodsSpanish.shtm> (Español)



People tend to eat what is readily available, easily accessible, and affordable. The choices that we make are often influenced by the choices that are available to us. These days we are often surrounded by fast food franchises, vending machines, and quick, inexpensive ways to overload on foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value. Such foods are classified in terms of energy density, which is a measure of the number of calories (or energy) in relation to the volume of the food. Thinking of foods in terms of energy density can be an important first step toward healthy weight management. High energy dense foods are often considered to be junk foods, such as chips, candy bars, ice cream, and fried foods; whereas low energy dense foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. One way to look at obesity is in terms of energy in and energy out. Environments that support access to nutritious foods can help influence healthy eating and therefore be an important step in reducing obesity rates.

The prevalence of high-energy dense foods certainly influences individuals' decisions. If options are not affordable, available, and abundant, people will not and cannot make healthy choices. Denton and Austin are two communities in Texas that have come to that realization and are making changes. At the University of North Texas in Denton (UNT), as with many colleges across the U.S., many students face the "Freshman 15," where they gain an extra 10 to 20 pounds in their first year of college. Being surrounded by fast foods, ready-made foods, and a lack of healthy choices in school cafeterias can make it difficult for students to eat healthy. However, the University of Northern Texas came to the conclusion that they could help by offering healthier eating options on campus.

Opened in the fall of 2006, Mean Greens cafeteria was created at the request of students to offer only portion-controlled healthy foods. Each menu option must have less than 300 calories, fewer than 10 grams of fat, and absolutely no deep-frying. Vegetarian and vegan options are also featured, and all dessert items have 150 calories or less. UNT's Dining Services made the decision to remodel one of their kitchens to include a grill and charbroiler to aid in the creation of healthier foods. The change did not require a major shift in funding, just minor budget adjustments. However, there are some extra costs associated with buying fresh foods, which the university has been willing to take on. So far the change seems to be making a positive impact on the campus community; students have stated that they are losing weight by eating at Mean Greens. With a focus on making food that tastes great and just happens to be healthy, Mean Greens is attracting a customer base of students, faculty, staff, and nearby residents alike. Recognized in 2007 by *Food Management Magazine* for the Best Wellness Initiative, UNT hopes that the Mean Greens concept will be picked up by other restaurants and college campuses across the country.

Initiatives like Mean Greens are happening throughout Texas. In Austin, it is the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro), which operates the regional public transportation bus system that has decided to help its employees make healthier choices. Capital Metro has over 1,250 employees; 600 of them are bus drivers. Bus drivers live a primarily sedentary lifestyle, sitting for most of the day and not having much time to eat healthy. In Austin, they refer to it as a 'Biscuits and Gravy' culture. With that kind of unhealthy lifestyle so prevalent, Capital Metro saw its healthcare costs increasing at a rate of 25 percent a year. In order to cut down on those rising costs, the company evaluated the foods being served onsite at the facility, and decided to speak to its food service provider about offering healthier options.

This led to a partnership in 2003 between Steps to a Healthier Austin and Capital Metro. Steps to a Healthier Austin, is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and partners with Health & Lifestyles Corporate Wellness, Inc. to provide worksite wellness programs. Health & Lifestyles was then hired by Capital Metro to help promote healthier lifestyles, increase employee morale, and combat rising healthcare costs and absenteeism rates. They decided to create a nurturing environment for weight loss and a healthier lifestyle by providing consultations with wellness coaches and personal trainers, a 24-hour company fitness center, personalized health assessments, and preventive screenings. The program expanded to include healthier food options, cash incentives, health newsletters, workshops, and dietary counseling. The cafeteria has a healthy options menu and a program where employees are able to get a pack of coupons to save money by choosing the healthier option – five dollars worth of coupons are available weekly to Capital Metro employees and contractors to purchase healthy cafeteria items. Participants in the wellness program reported improvements in physical activity levels, healthy food consumption, weight loss, and blood pressure. The company's total healthcare costs increased by progressively smaller rates from 2003 to 2006, and then decreased from 2006 to the present. Employee absenteeism has decreased by approximately 25 percent since the implementation of the program. However, the most rewarding effect of the program has been the impact on individuals' lives. Capital Metro now feels like more than just a workplace. One step at a time, without costing the company a lot of money, it has become a nurturing environment that helps its employees reach their goals and live healthier lives.