

Your Guide to a 'Healthy Town'

Royal Oak physician launches program to fight obesity epidemic

By Jennifer Clark

Excuse the pun, but obesity is a huge problem. And certainly no laughing matter. While it is a worldwide problem, this is definitely the case in America, where more than 70 percent of adults and 40 percent of children are considered overweight or obese, according to Body Mass Index international measurement standards.

In Michigan, which is ranked 16th among states for its obesity rate, more than 31 percent of the population is considered obese, up from 22.1 percent in 2000 and 13.2 percent in 1990 according to data from The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America released September 2016.

But how can individuals learn what healthy foods to eat, what foods to buy at the grocery store or how to serve nutritious meals at home? How can people modify their lifestyle to combat this health-threatening issue? Some people count calories or wear a FitBit®, but these do not address the missing link: information.

Enter HealthyTown-Everywhere, a free of charge health and wellness grocery store based project that is designed to combat obesity by providing information to support healthier behaviors and lifestyle choices within local communities. The pilot program, which originated in Royal Oak, includes a “hands-on” experience and education for adults and children by creating a partnership between local physicians, fitness experts, and dieticians, who travel to local grocery stores to educate the public.

“Our goal is to teach the public about the best foods to eat, how to read food labels, how to recognize the difference between healthy and non-healthy foods, and guide them to apply what they learn when shopping at their grocery stores,” said Paul Ehrmann, D.O., a health and wellness advocate and family physician, who created the program.

HealthyTown-Everywhere conducted two trial programs -- one in July and one in September -- at Royal Oak’s Holiday Market.

The two initial test programs included:

- Grocery store tours given by dietetic students overseen by licensed dieticians.
- Take home and Web-based materials to provide further nutritional guidance for children and their families.
- An adult and pediatric component measuring blood sugar and healthy weight measurements.
- A fitness component in cooperation with metro Detroit-based YMCAs.

“This free program guides individuals

to a healthier lifestyle, encouraging better food choices and offering weight management information to help them make behavior modifications,” said Ehrmann, the family physician at the Family Health Care Center of Royal Oak for more than 35 years.

Ehrmann was pleased with the success of the initial programs. He is now focusing on the next phase -- presenting a six-week program for 5th grade students at Northwood Elementary. Dietetic students from local universities will serve as part of the team to teach about nutrition and prepare for a field trip with their parents to Holiday Market on Nov. 3 to apply what they have learned. Dr. Ehrmann hopes to expand this partnership to involve other physicians and schools within the Royal Oak School district -- and beyond.

“We’ve spent nearly a year in planning, partnering with the Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce, Oakland County Health Department and Royal Oak Schools to establish the groundwork with the idea of creating a replicable template to expand the reach of the program after the evolving business model has been finalized,” said Dr. Ehrmann.

“I’m a strong believer that physicians have a responsibility to help prevent illness in the people they serve in their community,” Ehrmann continued. “I envision engaging more physicians who



Dr. Ehrmann



Michelle Mather, a MSU medical student, checked the blood pressure of participants at the recent HealthyTown event held at Holiday Market.

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