



Ottawa County's Golden Shoe Campaign on way

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By Greg Chandler

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OTTAWA COUNTY -- Concerned about the high percentage of residents reporting they are overweight or obese, a coalition of local health professionals wants to get people moving.

The Ottawa County Wellness Coalition in spring is launching a six-month effort to encourage people to walk to help get into shape.

The Golden Shoe Campaign will include designated routes in Holland, Zeeland and Grand Haven, and will offer some prizes.

"Lack of physical activity is a major factor in the top three causes of death in Ottawa County, as well as the rising cost of health care and insurance," coalition chairwoman Lisa Uganski said.

In a 2005 Ottawa County Health Department study, 40 percent of people surveyed reported they were overweight, while 19 percent classified themselves as being obese. That study also found one of three children, ages 3 to 13, were classified as being at-risk for becoming overweight, based on a body mass index screening that takes into consideration age, height and weight.

The Wellness Coalition is looking to develop partnerships with area businesses on the initiative. To date, Holland, Zeeland Community and North Ottawa hospitals are taking part with ODL Inc., a Zeeland-based company, said Becky Shupe, a health department educator and coalition member. The campaign will include opportunities for walkers to win new tennis shoes if they can find gold-painted shoes tucked in different locations on the designated 1- to 1 1/2-mile routes through downtown Grand Haven, Holland and Zeeland.

The campaign is patterned after an effort in Kent County, which wrapped up in November. "We thought it was a fun way to get people to be more active," said Barb Hawkins Palmer, coordinator of the Healthy Kent 2010 initiative.

The program was started in the Boston suburb of Cambridge, Mass., where wellness advocates conducted a month long campaign to encourage people to walk more as a form of fitness.

Kent County advocates saw the model and expanded it to a year long program, Palmer said. She said about 350 entry forms were filled out at participating businesses with more than 20,000 route maps distributed.

Through the end of December, more than \$17,000 had been contributed to cover the campaign's expenses, Uganski said.

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