

To Your Health!

L. Brooks Patterson Says Count Your Steps

Every New Year's Eve and birthday we toast: "To Your Health". Living that on a daily basis is a bit trickier, as we all know. Each edition we will highlight programs and strategies for taking charge of your health. We hope to become a trusted resource for you. Our featured program for this edition is a model of innovation.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and the County's Health Division have created, "Count Your Steps". Although this program works with elementary school children, we believe it to be a model for all ages. Childhood obesity has doubled in the United States over the past decade.

Students participating in "Count Your Steps" are given pedometers to record the number of steps they take. Students, with assistance from their parents, record their daily steps in a log which is submitted to their teachers on a weekly basis. Teachers track each student's progress by recording the number of steps on tally sheets weekly and then submit them to the Oakland County Health Division which tabulates the results. The top five walkers in each school along with the top performing classes, schools and school districts are awarded prizes. The yearly culmination of the program also includes a Family Fitness Day Celebration at the Detroit Zoo. In just over three years, total participants have logged 11 billion steps in the program.

"While the competition is exciting, the results of the program have done exactly what we wanted it to do for at least one month during the year," Patterson said. "We got the kids off the couch, away from their video games and outside for some healthy exercise. The kids are also more aware of the positive benefits of proper nutrition."

Because healthy eating and exercise go hand-in-hand, parents and students will also be provided tips on how to make good nutritional food choices. Much of the available data seems to strongly suggest that today's children may become the first generation of Americans who won't outlive their parents.

Consider the following:

- 300,000 people die every year from the complications of obesity, e.g. heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes.
- Nearly two out of three Americans are over-weight, a 50 percent increase from just a decade ago.
- Nearly 15 percent of our children and teenagers are overweight compared to just 4 percent in the 1960's.
- Studies show obese children between the ages of 10-13 have an 80 percent chance of becoming obese adults.
- More than a third of high school age students don't engage in vigorous physical activity ever.
- The economic cost of obesity in the United States is more than \$100 billion annually.

Consider starting a program like this in your area. Family walks are also a great way to connect with each other while doing something positive for our health.

Many thanks to the Oakland County Health Division and Economic Development and Community Affairs.