



Obesity still weighing on York County

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The York Daily Record/Sunday News has been devoting a lot of pages to chronicling York County's ongoing weight struggles. "Fat Battleground" started with a story that explored the fact that York is one of the most obese counties in the state. Other stories have covered how and why we get fat, and future stories will focus on solutions.

YorkCounts cares about this because obesity was one of the 38 indicators we tracked in our 2009 report. Depending on which numbers you look at, the county's obesity rate is somewhere in the range of 25 to 35 percent, meaning that anywhere from a quarter to a third of adults qualify as obese. In our numbers, which come from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the rate has hovered around 25 percent. The Healthy York County Coalition, which has been monitoring the health of York County every three years since 1994 through Community Health Assessments, reported numbers fluctuating between 26 percent and 39 percent. All the numbers show us falling short of HYCC's target of reaching 20 percent by the year 2000.

In 2009, YorkCounts and HYCC, along with a small group of community stakeholders, held some preliminary meetings on developing a comprehensive strategy for bringing the numbers down. The reasons for doing so are well established: obesity's the connection to a range of chronic illnesses, the loss of quality of life, the higher costs of medical care and insurance.

The meetings didn't get beyond the preliminary

stage for various reasons. But these York Daily Record stories show that a serious public health problem remains. First Lady Michelle Obama brought childhood obesity to the national spotlight earlier this year. Businesses continue to be plagued with soaring health care costs, due partly to overweight employees.

York city recognized the connection between obesity, public health and quality of life when it became an ACHIEVE community this year. ACHIEVE is a national program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that supports communities working to "develop and implement policy, systems, and environmental change strategies that can help prevent or manage health risk factors" related to a range of chronic health conditions, including obesity.

The city is the driving force for Eat-Play-Breathe, and obesity and its related problems are slightly more pronounced in the city, but organizers have a long-term plan to take what works in the city and use it as a model throughout the county. They see the potential for using amenities such as the Heritage Rail Trail County Park to connect walking paths and bike routes to popular downtown destinations. They see the value of giving thought to pedestrian access in the site design of economic development projects.


We hope they're also thinking about including schools and day-care facilities, which play a huge role with the food choices offered to children, and connecting with the fledgling York County Buy Fresh Buy Local chapter as a way to put more locally grown fruit, vegetables and meats in front of local consumers.

This is absolutely the kind of coordinated, collaborative effort needed to address one of the

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most serious threats to quality of life in York County.

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