Chamber Challenges Community to Improve Health

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A community-wide public health assessment of Sumter County highlighted the need for enhanced nutrition and fitness education to improve its overall health and reduce obesity rates. As a result, the Sumter County Archway Partnership engaged a graduate student from the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Public Health to compile a health and wellness guide that included an inventory of local parks, gyms, walking trails and other resources available throughout the community.

Utilizing the health and wellness guide, the Sumter County Archway Partnership Executive Committee, in partnership with the Americus-Sumter County Chamber of Commerce, launched the Chamber Challenge initiative in December 2013 to encourage greater community health and awareness. A kick-off event headlined by Dr. Marsha Davis, Associate Dean of the College of Public Health, highlighted workplace wellness and how employee health can affect both employers and the community. Her presentation entitled “Return on Investment in Public Health: Creating a Healthy Georgia” was presented to Chamber of Commerce members and other members of the community and Archway Executive Committee.

Davis encouraged attendees to advocate for Sumter County's health care needs by participating in wellness education and exercise programs. She focused on the health and wellness of employees and encouraged employers to promote nutrition education and fitness in the workplace.

Following Davis’ presentation, Faith Pinnell, vice president of the Chamber of Commerce Health & Wellness Division and local pharmacist, presented an overview of the newly created Chamber Challenge. The Chamber Challenge is a community-wide, 10-week weight loss competition designed specifically for small businesses to improve their employees’ health, but is open to anyone in the community. The program was adapted from Team Lean, a similar health initiative conducted by the Colquitt County YMCA.

The first Challenge kicked off in January 2014 and attracted more than 80 participants. The Chamber of Commerce partnered with three local businesses to serve as weigh-in stations on a weekly basis. At the end of the 10 weeks, cumulatively over 400 pounds were lost. "We hoped that by increasing employees’ overall health, that would lead to increased productivity, less sick days that need to be taken, just better energy at work," said Pinnell. Now in the second year of the Chamber Challenge, the program is expanding by adding a nutritional cooking class and extending the program to 12 weeks.

Advancing Community Priorities
Public health was identified as a priority need for Sumter County in 2011. The Chamber Challenge assists residents in improving their health by facilitating access to public health resources and providing opportunities for meaningful community collaboration.