

"A Local Community Collaboration Addressing Health Risk"

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Delaware County, Ohio is located in central Ohio, and is the fastest growing county in the State of Ohio. The U.S. Census reported that Delaware County's estimated July 2002 population was 125,399, a 6.1% increase from July 1, 2001, advancing it to the sixteenth fastest growing County in the country. Along with the public health issues that are impacted by rapid growth, we are also addressing the identified health risk of our county.

In 2002, a survey of 1,067 local adults showed at least 39 percent were overweight and 18 percent were obese. That same year, we calculated body mass indices for 2,718 students in 12 local schools; 29 percent were overweight or at risk for becoming so. Chronic diseases – heart disease, cancer, and diabetes – are our leading causes of death. Naturally, we are extremely concerned about a condition which could lead almost a third of our children and more than half of our adults to premature deaths.

We now see a link between our land-use development patterns, the lack of accessible walking and bicycling trails and poor community fitness. We are determined to make some wise decisions regarding future development planning which could lead to healthier residents in Delaware County over the long run.

We have put several programs into place to increase physical activity among adults and youth populations including:

- Delaware Area Walking Group (DAWG)-a collaboration with the Delaware County park systems which sponsors indoor and outdoor walking opportunities.
- Bald Eagle/Osprey School Viewing-schools were invited out to the wildlife area to view the Bald Eagles nesting and to enjoy a classroom outside and visit the wetland areas, and experience other environmental opportunities at the wildlife area. Over 1,000 students participated this year.
- Active for Life: A fitness program presented in cooperation with the American Cancer Society. The program was given to 25 area businesses to encourage them to adopt fitness programs for their employees. The businesses were ask to support fitness programs to encourage healthy potlucks, flex work schedules to accommodate fitness programs, offer onsite fitness programs, and to give out pedometers to their employees.
- National Walk our Children to School Day- an event which promotes community unity, and healthy behavior.
- Delaware Fitness Challenge-local organizations and businesses had a fitness competition for their employees.

Additionally, as a community collaboration we are now in the process of creating a Delaware County Greenways Master Plan consisting of planners, engineers, elected officials, park directors, and health officials. We will be performing a HIA within the community, and then we will begin drafting our Master Plan with possible technical assistance from the US EPA through their smart growth funding project. The Delaware County Greenways Master Plan will provide opportunities for recreation and fitness trail activities; protect important wildlife habitat and promote the conservation of open space, forests and wetland areas; link Delaware County neighborhoods with each other and with parks and other community assets; educate the public about the importance of the natural environment of the Greenways System; and become an economic asset to the community by promoting economic development and by making Delaware a desirable place where new businesses can locate.