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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 3, 2007

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NIH Designates Roswell, Georgia, a *We Can!* City To Join Nationwide Fight Against Childhood Overweight

ROSWELL, GEORGIA – The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will announce today that Roswell, Georgia, will become one of the first *We Can!* cities in the nation. *We Can!* (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) is a national education program developed by the NIH, a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to help prevent obesity and overweight in youth ages 8-13. As one of the first *We Can!* cities, Roswell is tackling childhood obesity by implementing evidence-based programs to help families learn to adopt healthier lifestyle habits to maintain a healthy weight.

Kicking off a regional *We Can!* event at the Adult Recreation Center in Roswell, Griffin P. Rodgers, M.D., director of the NIH’s National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), will present Roswell Mayor Jere Wood with a specially designed road sign to highlight the city’s participation in *We Can!* NIDDK is one of four NIH Institutes supporting *We Can!*

“The alarming trend of overweight in our children puts their health and well-being at risk,” said Dr. Rodgers. “Roswell is serving as a model city by showing how communities can be a vital part of the solution. We commend Mayor Wood and the City of Roswell for their growing commitment to guide parents and caregivers on the best ways to help their children maintain a healthy weight.”

“As a *We Can!* city, we will step up our efforts to create a healthier community by providing families with practical solutions to help their children eat well and move more,” said Mayor Wood. “Our partnership with the NIH through *We Can!* is part of my ongoing commitment to help parents learn strategies to prevent childhood overweight and obesity.”

The two-day regional *We Can!* event will be attended by more than 150 community leaders from 14 states. The event will showcase Roswell’s local efforts and feature national experts on science-based curricula developed for youth and for parents to promote healthy lifestyles.

Childhood overweight is a growing national epidemic. The percentage of children and teens who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years, and today one in three

children ages 2-19 are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. In Georgia, one in three (33 percent) middle school students and more than one in four (26 percent) high school students are overweight or are at risk for overweight (2003 Georgia Student Health Survey). Like adults, overweight youth are at risk for health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, and asthma.

"The National Institutes of Health developed *We Can!* to bring to our communities research-based information and strategies to teach children how to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors that can help them maintain a healthy weight," noted NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, M.D. "Through the efforts of communities like Roswell, *we can* make a difference."

As part of the *We Can!* City Program, NIH will provide technical assistance on planning and implementing *We Can!*, as well as materials such as parent handbooks, posters, videos, and the one-stop resource "We Can! Energize Our Community: Toolkit for Action." As a *We Can!* city, Roswell has agreed to offer obesity prevention programs to both parents and youth in collaboration with a variety of community-based partners. In addition, Roswell will distribute *We Can!* tips and information on maintaining a healthy weight to all city employees.

Roswell area residents have already begun embracing *We Can!* activities offered through the Roswell Recreation and Parks Department and Athens-Clarke County Leisure Services. The two organizations joined together to be one of 14 *We Can!* Intensive Community Sites selected by the NIH to pilot the nationwide program beginning in June 2005. As a *We Can!* intensive community, the groups have reached thousands of youth and parents through community events and *We Can!* curricula provided in partnership with area schools, hospitals, and businesses.

We Can! offers parents, health professionals, youth, and community groups evidence-based programs and activities to help children ages 8-13 maintain a healthy weight. The program targets parents and caregivers as the primary group for influencing youth and focuses on *three* important behaviors: *improved* food choices, *increased* physical activity and *reduced* recreational screen time. *We Can!* is a collaboration of the [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#) with three other NIH institutes: the [National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#); the [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#); and the [National Cancer Institute](#).

For additional information on *We Can!*, visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call toll-free 1-866-35-WeCan.

Media interviews will be available on May 3, 11:00 AM ET at the Adult Recreation Center in Roswell with Dr. Rodgers, Mayor Wood, and Morgan Rodgers, assistant director of the Roswell Recreation and Parks Department.

Photo opportunity will be available when Mayor Wood receives a Roswell *We Can!* City Road Sign from Dr. Rodgers designating Roswell, Georgia, as a *We Can!* City.

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The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.