



**Press Release**

For immediate release

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**Local event focuses on healthy babies in Putnam County**

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA, June 4, 2008—Over a hundred attendees and a dozen exhibitors participated in the event ***Celebrating Healthy Babies—A Healthy Baby Begins with You*** on Saturday, May 31, 2008 in Palatka.

***A Healthy Baby Begins with You*** is a national campaign to raise awareness about infant mortality with an emphasis on the African American community. The Putnam County Black Infant Health Initiative, Healthy Start of North Central Florida, WellFlorida and community partners in Putnam County hosted a local event based on this campaign. Information, education and resources to promote healthy babies and healthy families in Putnam County was the focus of the event.

Mayor Karl N. Flagg opened the event with welcome remarks and local groups including Mt. Tabor Youth Group, God's Example, and Stepping Soldiers for Christ provided entertainment throughout the day.

Keynote speaker Eric M. Kelly, Regional Vice President of Allegany Franciscan Ministries and Chairman of the Palm Beach County Healthy Start Coalition discussed the high rate of infant mortality among blacks and why it is important for African Americans to address this issue and act locally. The issue is personally and professionally important to Kelly, as he was born and raised in Palatka.

“Research has shown that Putnam County has the highest rate of infant mortality deaths in Florida,” Kelly said. “For every 1,000 black babies born in Putnam County, 27 will die before they are a year old,” Kelly said.

Lindsey Michaels of WellFlorida Council shared insights gained through research and focus groups about the high infant mortality rates among blacks in Putnam County.

“Our approach is one baby is too many regardless of race, color, creed or ethnicity,” Michaels said. “This is a very complex issue that is going to take commitment from community members in Putnam County,” Michaels said.

Putnam County was one of eight Florida counties selected to participate in a project aimed at reducing black infant mortality. Putnam County has the highest infant mortality rate in the state. The project consists of conducting research to develop recommendations to decrease infant mortality rates. ***Celebrating Healthy Babies-A Healthy Baby Begins with You*** was held to build public awareness of the problem and to provide helpful resources within the community.

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