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PRESS RELEASE

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Extension Helps Support Healthy Schools & Communities in Sullivan

SULLIVAN COUNTY – National and international data shows definitively that communities with a “built environment” that promotes a sense of pride and provides opportunities to move safely in neighborhoods have lower crime rates, better health outcomes, and increased business revenues.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County (CCESC)’s Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (HSC) program emphasizes “access” to the built environment (e.g., crosswalks, signage, facilities, etc.) and employs environmental strategies and action steps that focus on enhancing municipal government and organizational policies. The goal of HSC is to increase access to healthy foods, water, and safe opportunities for physical activity, which offers a different approach than traditional direct nutrition education. HSC is currently engaged in several efforts to help the community organize in a way that makes it easier for people to choose healthier food options and physical movement to improve their health.

The HSC program is a five year initiative funded by the New York State Department of Health and hosts three full-time staff members who work in the Fallsburg, Liberty, and Monticello School District catchment areas, covering seven municipalities. The municipalities include Bethel, Fallsburg, Forestburgh, Liberty, Mamakating, Monticello, and Thompson. Wanda Cruz, SueAnn Boyd, and Emily Devore make up the HSC team, which operates out of the Extension Education Center on 64 Ferndale-Loomis Road in Liberty.

Since spring of 2016, the HSC program has made considerable progress within all of the local school districts that it is funded to serve. CCESC is a partner member of school district-wide wellness committees in Fallsburg, Liberty, Monticello, and Sullivan BOCES. Playing an active role with the CCE Eat Smart New York (ESNY) program in helping districts assess how their policies meet federal school lunch nutrition and activity standards, the team assists in editing and writing policies and in planning and supporting programs that promote those policies in individual school buildings.

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

On the community side of the initiative, several developments are underway. The Catskill Edible Garden Project (CEGP) is a partnership of Sullivan Renaissance, Catskill Mountainkeeper, CCESC, and local school districts. CEGP builds school gardens to promote educational experiences in science, math, health, and nutrition. The newest garden is being planned and prepared at Fallsburg Junior/Senior High School. The fresh produce grown will be used in the school for student taste-testing, food prep, and nutrition education, exemplifying hands-on, project-based learning strategies that contribute to student success and wellness. The HSC program was also able to equip each of the three school districts with salad bars to provide students, faculty, and staff access to more fresh grown vegetables.

Through the same CEGP partnership, staff provides technical assistance and educational programs at the Monticello Housing Authority. These efforts led to a new organizational policy that allows, and encourages, residents to have their own container gardens. The ESNY program complements the gardens with nutrition education for youth residents at the complex. Together, these strategies set the stage for healthy habits and low-cost, fresh food for residents during the growing season.

As part of the Liberty Networking Group, the HSC team is working with the Parksville Trails Committee to enhance access and signage for the Parksville Rail Trail. In Fallsburg, there is a plan in the infant stages to provide the town and other interested partners with outdoor fitness trail equipment. CCESC is also working with Sullivan BOCES to install an outdoor fitness trail on the nature trail at the Extension Education Center as a demonstration tool. The project will help the HSC team to troubleshoot installation barriers and assist other communities interested in building this type of trail.

The “Healthy Cart, Health Heart” Corner Store project promotes healthier food options to customers by supporting small food retailers in the most population dense parts of the county. Many residents in Fallsburg, Liberty, and Monticello have little or no transportation and live several miles from a grocery store. By providing corner stores with cooler space, shelving, signage, and developing cooperative buying arrangements, the HSC seeks to help those business owners raise their profitability through the sale of fresh produce while also making it easy for a parent shopping with small children to leave the store with fruit as a snack, instead of candy.

“In addition to increasing physical activity, these public health projects have the potential to build community and have a positive economic impact,” said Colleen Monaghan, CCESC executive director.

“We look forward to continuing this important work with community members and partners.”

The public can learn more about the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities program, its projects and partnerships, and Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County by visiting www.sullivanccce.org, e-mailing sullivan@cornell.edu, or calling 845-292-6180.

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