

Saanich Youth Super Size their Health, cont...

local initiative with the provincial Active Communities Initiative, ActNow BC and 2010 Legacies Now. News stories and advertisements in the local media helped to spread the word that Active Saanich had arrived. Signs, posters and bulletins went up in buildings, parks, malls, bus shelters, community association newsletters, water bills, tax mail-outs and websites.

A new trail guide is in the works for fall 2007. By highlighting the local walking trails, the guide will be a tool for Active Saanich to encourage people to get active.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Parker, like others, has found the biggest challenge to be finding the time to develop the community into an Active Community. To make it happen, Saanich Recreation has allocated an almost half-time position to advance the team's plan. In addition, staff members at the recreation centres help with verbal promotions and day-to-day operations of the Highway to Health program.

While developing Active Saanich, the team realized that larger initiatives get "more bang for the buck" because of their higher public profile and less staff time, so have made these more of a focus of the team's work.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

BCRPA held an Active Communities Active Workplace workshop on the Island on April 19, 2007. After the session, Saanich municipal employees were given orientations and have since participated in workplace challenges. Active Saanich is lobbying the District to hire a part-time health and wellness staff person to run the employee challenge to free other workers for community-based efforts.

"Employee wellness has made a really big impact. We reach a ton of people in a very quick way," Parker said. *"We might reach one employee, but we've reached all their children and their family at the same time, and they've gotten on board and done it."*

Saanich is working on the launch of its Active Business campaign in conjunction with Active Communities Greater Victoria. The committee is planning to put together a kit for businesses to implement a workplace wellness program to get them on the Highway to Health.

TRACKING SUCCESS

Active Saanich is tracking employee involvement in wellness programs with surveys before and after (number of participants and how many stuck with the program, number of minutes participants are increasing their activity levels by) to compare the impact of the program year to year. In addition, they are tracking numbers of participants in Move for Health Day (May 10) events, the Highway to Health program and recreation centres. The team also plans to make use of BCRPA Active Communities evaluation tools to monitor Saanich's progress in meeting the 2010 challenge.

WaterFit is a Hit in Esquimalt

Written in June 2007

Active Communities Esquimalt is changing lifestyles in its community—from the senior who could walk again after a WaterFit program, to a television reporter going through a fitness makeover in the limelight.

Esquimalt Parks and Recreation is developing local programs and events, as well as involving itself in regional initiatives with the Greater Victoria Active Community committee, such as the Highway

to Health activity tracker and the Active Parents Pass.

GETTING THEIR FEET WET

The Active Communities Water-Fit-A-Thon on Move for Health Day (May 10, 2007) gave newcomers a free sample of a variety of aquatic classes. The sessions are geared for different levels and include activities like Aqua Yoga, Aqua Prepost Natal, Senior's Fit, Deep WaterFit

and Circuit Fit. The 35 participants were rewarded with nutritious snacks and draw prizes. A similar event, the Supersweat



Social, was held on dry land in January, with about 30 people accessing fitness programs.

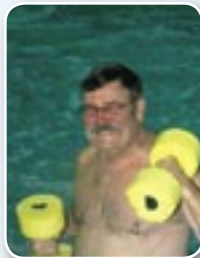
“It was a free session for people to find out what type of activity would best suit them to lead an active lifestyle,” said Active Community Team Leader Christina Smirl, who is the Township of Esquimalt’s Aquatics and Fitness Coordinator. *“It opened their eyes to a totally new program.”*

Smirl has heard positive feedback from participants on how programs such as the WaterFit class for arthritis has changed their lives.

“We had one person I was talking to who said, ‘I don’t think I would have been able to walk again if I didn’t know about this program and you hadn’t taken the time to actually meet with me and discuss it,’” Smirl recalled.

STRATEGIES FOR SENIORS

Esquimalt Parks and Recreation created an Active Aging Strategy for 2007 to 2009. The plan to encourage older adults to get active was developed with input from surveys and focus groups. Silver Threads Seniors Centre was a partner in the project.



In addition to getting active themselves, local seniors have been putting in volunteer time building sustainable programs. Smirl noted that University of Victoria students have also been a huge help in moving the initiative forward.

“Human and financial resources are the biggest challenges,” Smirl has found. The aim of building a volunteer base is to sustain the programs past 2010, with or without funding. The team is working to get volunteers to start walking groups for older adults.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Community partners have also been a key part of Active Communities Esquimalt’s success. The Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, municipal staff and council, the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Silver Threads Seniors Centre, the LifeMark Health Unit, and local dieticians, physiotherapists and fitness programmers have jumped on board.

Through a partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Arthritis Society, as well as a \$5,000 BCRPA Active Communities grant, Active Communities Esquimalt has been putting on free health education workshops. The workshops began after Esquimalt’s baseline measurement survey of activity levels showed a common barrier to getting active was a lack of knowledge, especially for those with health concerns. So, the workshops aim to show people where to begin and what activities they can safely accomplish. The information sessions range from stroke prevention to heart health to gardening with arthritis. This fall, workshops will focus on osteoporosis awareness, packing healthy school lunches and caring for children’s backs by carrying school bags properly.

Another partner is a local grocery store, Country Grocer. To link active living with healthy eating, people who buy a pass or drop-in punch card at the rec centre receive a punch card for 10 free pieces of fruit at Country Grocer.

“They can walk over to the grocery store and get a piece of fruit right after their workout,” Smirl said.

Last year (2006), Parks and Recreation incorporated the Active Communities Initiative into a televised wellness makeover through A-Channel. Six candidates representing a variety of demographics were selected from hundreds of people vying to be a part of the program. The rec centre provided participants with a pass and free personal training during the

- Working regionally to plan, implement and promote active programs, services resources and events
- Running the Highway to Health online activity tracker program
- Securing grant funds from BCRPA’s Active Communities (\$5,000) and regionally (\$5,000) and the UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund (\$11,275)
- Forming partnerships with businesses in the community
- Encouraging children and youth to eat healthy through the Eat Well, Get Moving program
- Offering an Active Parents Pass to provide new parents with access to recreation opportunities
- Offering discount recreation passes in April through the Taste of Recreation program
- Offering free access to recreation through the Supersweat Social event and the Water-Fit-A-Thon on Move for Health Day May 10
- Hosting free health education workshops with community partners
- Reaching out to the Songhees First Nation to participate in recreation programs
- 38 schools in Greater Victoria registered with Action! Schools BC

Esquimalt Info

- **Population:** 16,840 (BC Stats 2006)
- **Region:** Vancouver Island
- **About Esquimalt:** Esquimalt is 2 km west of Victoria, on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Esquimalt residents and visitors can access a variety of activities including parks, beaches, sports and recreation facilities, and walkways. The community includes a mix of commercial, residential and industrial development. The Township is home to a Canadian Forces Naval Base, its largest employer.

(Source: www.esquimalt.ca)

WaterFit is a Hit in Esquimalt, cont...

three-month makeover. The program also educated participants on the importance of sustainable, healthy, active lifestyles. One of the participants was an A-Channel reporter, who became a champion of the wellness makeover. Because of time constraints, the makeover didn't go ahead this year; however Smirl expects it will re-surface in 2008, with a family focus.

To reach out to neighbouring Aboriginal communities, Active Communities Esquimalt has partnered with the Songhees First Nation to offer rec facility passes and discounts for pedometers. The Songhees health and wellness coordinator has been encouraging band members, particularly elders, to walk to the rec centre to go for a swim or WaterFit class. Elders have been participating in the morning WaterFit classes. Elders and at-risk youth are also being encouraged to register with the Highway to Health program and to start wearing pedometers.

CORPORATE WELLNESS

The township has launched a workplace wellness program to get city staff active. Participants receive an Active Communities Esquimalt corporate wellness game card, with a list of various activities to complete. Those include taking a fitness class or WaterFit class, eating a nutritious breakfast, substituting fruit for an unhealthy snack, using cardio equipment in the Wellness Centre for at least 20 minutes, eating five servings of fruits and vegetables in a day, completing a Wellness Centre orientation, drinking at least six glasses of water, going swimming or skating or participating in a drop-in sports night and doing something active that they enjoy, such as walking the dog, playing a sport or shopping. Once completed, employees turn the card in to the rec centre for a chance to win two free personal training sessions. Staff can also play in lunchtime drop-in sports.

WHAT'S NEXT

Esquimalt developed an Active Communities Walking Routes Guide which included nutrition tips, stretching tips for older adults and suggested balance and joint movement exercises. The next big project is a guide to healthy active living programs and services for everyone which will be distributed in the community and doctors' offices.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

Esquimalt Parks and Recreation is now evaluating and refining the initiative's progress to ensure it's having an impact. Smirl plans to use the BCRPA's TRACE (Tools and Resources for Active Communities Evaluation) tool, and also hopes to re-survey the public this fall to assess self-perceptions of activity levels and awareness of the Active Communities Initiative.

"Our main area right now is taking a step back and seeing where we are and ensuring that what we are doing is, in fact, sustainable; and tweaking things as needed because we seem to have a lot of good momentum going," Smirl said.

A good indicator of progress is growing interest in information on active lifestyles.

"We have handouts focused on different demographics and we can't keep them stocked enough," Smirl noted. *"There is a buzz going on - a quiet one, but there's definitely a buzz of people talking and inquiring as to what resources we have on active living, which was never the case before."*

