



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



Rethinking Public Health

Eat Smart Restaurant Week kicked off for a two-week stretch earlier this month and continues this week. Thirty-five Putnam eateries joined the effort to demonstrate first hand that delicious and healthy can go hand in hand. Dine-in restaurants, delicatessens, one “fast-food” chain and a few cafeteria style food establishments worked closely with health department nutritionists to fine-tune selected menu items to ensure they were both delicious and healthy.

Public health has always been about community health and disease prevention. Ensuring safe food practices with restaurant inspections is often touted as one of public health’s greatest achievements. But now Putnam County food sanitarians and inspectors, together with our nutritionists and health educators, are taking public health to a new and higher level.

New challenges have arisen for public health and number-one is the epidemic proportion of our population struggling with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Each has behavioral components inextricably entwined in today’s social norms, like little time, fast food and sedentary lives.

By developing community partnerships, and using social marketing and special event management, avenues traditionally utilized by big business to boost profits, Putnam County Department of Health staff members are showing that the public sector can also make use of these techniques to educate and inspire the public to make more informed and healthier choices.

Eat Smart Restaurant Week is not our only trailblazing initiative. A second health department event, Run 4 Your Life on September 7, attacked another essential ingredient for good health. Road races and walks are not new, but our event was envisioned as a fun family day, with a focus on physical activity. The importance of exercise for good health cannot be overstated. The challenge is finding a way to incorporate it into your life and there is no better way than to make it a family or group social activity.

That leads me to a third ongoing initiative, a pilot worksite wellness program with three local businesses. For some time, big corporations have implemented programs to help employees enjoy healthier lives. Corporate America understands that a healthier workforce improves their bottom line by decreasing absenteeism and improving morale. Putnam’s smaller businesses, with fewer resources, often can’t offer employees a wellness program. The Health Department is providing our expertise and experience to assist small businesses in developing these effective programs.

One final September event is our Second Annual Movie Night on September 26 for National Preparedness Month. We’re showing World War Z, providing free popcorn, emergency food samples, and a free raffle for a crank radio, all for the purpose of furthering emergency preparedness in our county.

These are just some of the ways we are striving to reimagine public health and improve the health landscape in Putnam.