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Grant for a healthier community

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The Office of Healthy Ohio recently awarded \$90,000 to the Washington County Health Department as part of its 2010 Creating Healthy Communities program.

The grant is designed to help the local health department find ways to improve the health of area residents through environmental, systems and policy change, said Court Witschey, health promotions coordinator at the Washington County Health Department.

The bulk of the grant has already been earmarked for projects, including commitments to fund restoration efforts at Washington Playground, expand the Harvest of Hope community gardening program and install bike racks along the Marietta River Trail.

About \$10,000 will also be used to help ensure the continued access of community members to Selby General Hospital's tobacco prevention program.

"I can't really say one project is more important than another," Witschey said. "We're targeting schools, homes and our entire community in an effort to promote healthy lifestyles."

The grant, which filters down to the local office from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has been awarded locally in the past; however, it was for less money and had been more restrictive in its use, Witschey said.

"In the past... it was restricted to promoting cardiovascular health," he said. "This year, they're allowing communities to target chronic disease, which can be caused by poor nutrition, physical inactivity and tobacco use."

The grant money recently allowed for gym equipment to be installed at the Washington County Courthouse for employees to utilize.

County commissioners agreed to provide some space in the courthouse annex and to allow workers 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon to take advantage of the equipment. The equipment is also available to employees during their lunch hour and after work.

Juvenile Court employee Lisa Burkhart, 52, of Marietta, said she has used the equipment daily since it was installed.

"I hope other employees start to take advantage of it, too," Burkhart said. "It's important to your health."

Burkhart said she believes the workouts help reduce stress and make her more alert and productive at work.

Fact Box

Where the money will go:

Partnering with the city of Marietta to install bike racks along the Marietta River Trail and at strategic community locations: \$2,000.

Partnering with Selby General Hospital to continue providing tobacco cessation and prevention programs in communities, schools and work sites throughout Washington County: \$10,000.

Partnering with the Fountain Foundation to continue refurbishments to the Washington Playground: \$5,000.

Partnering with Harvest of Hope to expand the Community Gardening Program in Belpre, New Matamoras and Marietta: \$4,000.

Partnering with the River Valley Mountain Bike Association to continue developing the Marietta Trail System: \$2,000.

Partnering with Action For Healthy Kids to train local preschools to adopt health education curricula and school wellness policies: \$2,000.

Partnering with local county work sites to adopt policy and environmental changes that will support healthy, productive workers: \$2,000.

Source: Washington County Health Department.

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