

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 18, 2006

FIT KIDS PROGRAM TEAMS UP WITH NATIONAL WALKING ADVOCATE AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION TO PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVING IN WESTCHESTER

As partners in healthy living, the Health Department's Fit Kids program is joining with the Rye YMCA Activate America Coalition to encourage community member participation in the coalition's upcoming conference *Building Healthier Communities*. The two day conference will take place tomorrow, October 19 and Friday, October 20 and will feature Mark Fenton, host of the former PBS television series "America Walking."

The Rye YMCA Activate America Coalition was established in 2005 to promote healthy lifestyle habits within the community. The Coalition is especially focused on encouraging healthy eating and physical activity habits among school children. The organization actively promotes the Westchester County Fit Kids program and has offered a \$1,000 grant to any school in the Rye, Rye Neck, Mamaroneck and Harrison school districts that joins the Fit Kids program, completes a School Health Index and organizes a project to promote physical activity and healthy eating. To date, a third of the schools in the Coalition's target area have joined the Fit Kids program, which helps schools establish wellness programs, improve lunch menus, and organize exciting events to promote physical activity.

"We are delighted to see this kind of grassroots involvement in the effort to improve the health of children in Westchester," said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., J.D., M.P.H, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. "The number of overweight and obese children has tripled over the past two decades. That will have dire health consequences in the future unless we can reverse the trend."

The Activate America Coalition conference will discuss such topics as fitness-friendly communities, safe walk-to-school routes, and pedometer-based walking programs. As a nationally recognized walking

MORE

advocate and author of several books on walking including *Pedometer Walking*, Mark Fenton is expected to contribute much to the discussions.

Events on Thursday include a Safe Routes to School Workshop from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Rye Neck Middle/High School on Hornidge Road, Mamaroneck, followed by a presentation on the Power of Walking at the Rye Recreation Center, Midland Avenue in Rye, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Friday's activities begin with a 30 minute walk with Mark Fenton at 7:30 a.m., followed by a municipal leader's breakfast and presentation on Building Fitness-Friendly Communities, which will run from 8:15 to 9:30 a.m. at the Mamaroneck Village Court on Mt. Pleasant Avenue. The conference will conclude with a Walkable Community Workshop from 9:45 to 11:15 a.m. Participation in the conference is free. To register, please call Gregg Howells at (914) 967-6363.

Westchester County's Fit Kids Program was developed to provide guidance and assist schools in creating healthy environments, thereby reducing the incidence of overweight among Westchester's school children. Since its inception in March 2003, schools throughout the County have been encouraged to join the Fit Kids program. To date, nearly 80 schools in over 30 school districts have participated in Fit Kids activities with positive feedback from teachers, parents, administrators and students.

Fit Kids works with schools in many capacities. The program partners with school administrators to:

- Improve the quality of food offered in their cafeterias and vending machines;
- Create opportunities for increased regular physical activity among students before, during and after school;
- Develop a "school-home connection" by giving parents information on nutrition and physical activity;
- Encourage environmental change and the development of policies that support good nutrition, physical activity and the promotion of healthy behaviors.

For more information about the Fit Kids program, please call the Westchester County Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department website at www.westchestergov.com/health.