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TURN OFF TV – TURN ON LIFE!

Westchester County Encourages Residents to Tune Out, Get Together and Be Active

Looking for a sure fire way to increase physical activity and family together time? You're just a click away. Simply power off your television set during National TV Turnoff Week, April 23 – 29 and get going on enjoying other fun family activities instead.

“On average, Americans watch more than four hours of television a day,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “This makes it almost certain that families are not getting enough exercise. TV Turnoff Week will give children and families a chance to interact and explore healthier activities. Why not start a family garden, spend an afternoon at the park or take a walk around your neighborhood? Almost anything expends more energy than sitting on the couch and watching television.”

Lack of physical activity is thought to be a primary cause for the dramatic increase in overweight and obesity among children over the past two decades. Being significantly overweight can increase the risk of many chronic illnesses, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some types of cancer.

“Childhood obesity has reached epidemic levels in the United States largely due to poor diet and inadequate physical activity,” said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Viewing too much TV is certainly a contributing factor because it severely restricts the opportunity for more physical activity and encourages an unhealthy diet. TV viewing also increases exposure to advertisements for high-sugar and high-calorie foods.”

In response to the growing obesity problem among children, County Executive Andy Spano launched the Fit Kids program in March, 2003. Since that time, 96 schools in Westchester have participated in Fit Kids activities that promote healthy eating and exercise. The Fit Kids program, which was recently highlighted in

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the April 2007 edition of In Town magazine, has helped many school districts plan physical activities, offer healthier food alternatives, and empower students to make better choices.

Every year, the Fit Kids program sponsors a No Junk Food Week campaign during March, which has been a tremendous success in helping to improve the diet of Westchester children. This year, 50 schools with approximately 28,000 students participated. It is hoped that TV Turnoff Week will have a similar impact on improving physical activity habits.

The Fit Kids program recently sent materials on the TV Turnoff Week campaign to 150 elementary school principals and 150 school nurses in Westchester. Materials are also being distributed at the WHUD Kids Fair on April 21 and through Health Department clinics. The materials are also available for downloading from the Health Department website. Included in the materials is a cover that can be taped to a TV set to remind the family to TURN OFF THE TV AND TURN ON LIFE!

Another anti-obesity effort, Be Fit Westchester, was established in 2004 to reinforce the message of Fit Kids with adults. Through this initiative, residents are encouraged to become more active through a Mall Walk program at The Westchester and the local travels of the Be Fit Mobile. The county has also reached out to Westchester restaurateurs to eliminate the use of cooking oils that contain trans fats in their establishments. To date, over 400 restaurants have signed on as “Be Fit Restaurants” by pledging to use healthier cooking oils.

In addition, 18 Westchester municipalities have been recruited for the county’s newest Be Fit initiative, the *Mayor’s and Supervisor’s Community Health Challenge*. Municipalities participating in the challenge have agreed to create and implement activities and programs within their communities this spring that encourage residents to get fit and stay fit. From sponsoring organized walks and developing recreational grounds to launching bicycle programs and compiling healthy cookbooks, the participating municipalities are all doing their part to support the county’s anti-obesity efforts.

For more information about TV Turnoff Week, please call the Health Department at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department's Fit Kids website at www.westchestergov.com/health/Fitkids.htm. To learn more about Westchester County’s Be Fit program, log onto www.westchestergov.com/fitness.