

Healthy eating means a healthy Grays Harbor

“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch

Grays Harbor has shown that it cares about health!

I have three recent pieces of evidence to support that. First, in November 56 percent of voters here supported the smoking ban and compliance with the law has been widespread. Second, there’s apparently no place that supports the cancer Relay for Life better than our community.

The third – more personal – piece of evidence is the response I’ve received from this column in the last few months. It’s been encouraging to me to hear how the column has motivated many Harborites to start, increase or maintain their activity level for health’s sake.

That’s why I’m confident that this same community can get engaged in making “health” mean more than healthcare or the absence of disease. It’s a big job and means tackling healthy eating as well as active living.

Healthy nutrition choices and an increase in physical activity will result in fewer of us needing the services offered by the many healthcare providers available in our community.

It’s well known that the environment in which we live shapes our health. This is true of our eating habits and choices. As I look at our

food environment in Grays Harbor I see both positives and challenges.

We certainly have the healthiest foods, fruits and vegetables, readily available. While shopping at a local produce stand recently I noticed it was crowded – a good sign. We have several grocery stores and farmer’s markets that offer great fresh produce and, seasonally, farms where we can buy both fresh and local. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to see these businesses overwhelmed with demand!

The health benefits of fish and seafood are becoming more and more well known. Growing up with my dad and four brothers who were avid fishermen meant frequent fish dinners and I still can’t get enough. How lucky we are to live where fresh seafood is so abundant!

Promoting healthy nutrition for ourselves and all the residents of Grays Harbor means looking at both the individual choices we make and the practices of businesses and organizations.

It’s certainly gratifying to see Grays Harbor school districts adding nutritious food choices to the place that our young people spend most of their time. There’s reduced fat content in lunches, more veggies and whole grains are offered, and fewer sugar drinks are showing up in vending machines.

It is a positive sign that harbor schools are being proactive in implementing healthy changes...many of them are making nutritional standards a priority issue.

While the kids are in school many adults spend the better part of their day at work. While there are obviously no nutrition standards for

the work place, employers can evaluate ways to support better nutrition choices. What's served at meetings? What's in the vending machines?

Speaking of vending machines, the businesses that own the machines have an opportunity to be pro-active in offering us all healthier choices. This doesn't mean we can't enjoy a candy bar on occasion, it's just helpful when other options are also available!

When I'm not at work I love to eat at our local restaurants. I have noticed and appreciate healthier menu choices in several places, including some fast food places. For me, portion control is an issue – if it's there, I'll eat it. Seeing smaller portion meals offered to more than just "seniors" would be a welcome alternative as well.

In Grays Harbor, grabbing a "meal" at the ballpark is the routine for many families trying to fit a sports event into a busy schedule. Are there any nutritious foods offered at the concession stand? Adding a few healthy foods could encourage nutritious choices. How about an apple or banana with that burger?

As you can see, choosing healthy eating can be influenced in many sectors of our community. Each of us can make a difference by looking at our own environment – all of the places we spend time, not just home – and advocating for the norm to become offering nutritious food options that support health for all of us.

Together we can make a difference and continue to show our commitment to a healthier Grays

Harbor – one bite and one step at a time.

This week's challenge

Back in April we challenged you to time yourself taking a walk in a place where you regularly or at least occasionally walk. This week we're challenging you to time yourself again to mark your improvement! If you've been walking, the clock should give you some encouraging feedback!

Mark your Calendar

...Festival of People in Montesano

July 28-30 – There's plenty of activity to be had here. Call 249-3021 x 112 for more information. Plan a walk around Friends Landing or Lake Sylvia to start or end the day.

Remember, get out and discover what's in "your own backyard." This area has an abundance of resources just waiting for the motivated to discover. If you find that you don't like walking in the woods, pick a safe walking route close to home. Don't like to walk? Try biking or going to the gym. Make time to fit exercise into your day everyday and you will feel the difference. Keep "Moving Grays Harbor".

Maryann Welch is the director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.