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## TOWN OF JAY ACHIEVES RECOGNITION AS A HEALTHY COMMUNITIES CHAMPION



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**Milton, Fla** - The Town of Jay has been recognized as a 2019 Healthy Communities Champion by the Florida Department of Health and the Healthiest Weight Florida program. This recognition makes Jay the first local government entity of Santa Rosa County to make the list. Thirty-eight towns and counties from Florida were selected this year. The Florida Department of Health (FDOH) recognizes and assists communities making Health in All Policies an integral part of their comprehensive planning. Each year, FDOH invites communities to share their stories and best practices for a chance to be honored through the Healthy Community Champions Recognition Program.

The Town of Jay promotes a healthy and active lifestyle in its projects and sponsored events. The town promotes health through athletics and youth activities with family-oriented outdoor exercise at Bray-Hendricks Park. This 40-acre park is the hub of many family-oriented athletic leagues, and as a result, increased emphasis has been placed on creating a master plan for the park. The Bray-Hendricks Park Master Plan will upgrade all existing fields, courts, and playgrounds. The town is also in the process of renovating the abandoned livestock market into a Farmers Market for local farmers to sell their produce and other locally made food products. The Jay High School Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) organization has requested that all town-sponsored events be tobacco-free. With a unified ban of tobacco at public events, both at Jay High School and the Town of Jay, the town will increase the overall health of young adults and reduce future medical costs.

“In August, the Santa Rosa County Health Department encouraged all the local governments in the county to complete an application and share their best practices,” explained Santa Rosa County Public Health Services Manager, Matt Dobson. “We are pleased the department recognizes what we already know. Santa Rosa has much to offer in the area of healthy living. We must strive to improve the health of all our residents.”

Obesity rates in the U.S. have increased dramatically over the last 30 years, reaching epidemic proportions. Obesity increases the risk for many serious health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. Obesity and associated chronic diseases have a considerable economic impact on communities and individuals, especially where availability and access to healthy foods and healthy spaces for physical activity are limited.

In Florida, only 33.9% of adults are at a healthy weight. To address this issue, the Florida Department of Health created the Healthy Community Champions Recognition Program. The program recognizes communities taking a Health in All Policies approach to comprehensive

planning, and provides a platform to share accomplishments, best practices, and lessons learned.

Health in All Policies, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “is a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policy decisions across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people.”

Local governments can play a pivotal role in improving public health by implementing policies and practices that have been shown to increase physical activity and improve nutrition. These “best practice” policies are reflected in the submission form and also align with the 2017-2021 State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP).

“We hope other local city and county governments will apply next year. It is a recognition that can help share the positive things Santa Rosa County has to offer its residents and visitors,” added Dobson.

Florida municipalities (cities, towns, and villages) and counties are eligible to apply. Submissions must be made by a municipal or county official. Unincorporated areas may apply under the sponsorship of their county. The application process for 2020 will open in June of next year.

The Healthy Community Champions Recognition Program offers technical assistance to communities to further the adoption and implementation of local programs. State partners include the Florida Department of Transportation, Department of Economic Opportunity and Department of Environmental Protection. For more information contact Matt Dobson in the community health division of the Santa Rosa County Health Department at 850-564-2233 or visit the Healthiest Weight Florida website at [www.HealthiestWeightFlorida.com](http://www.HealthiestWeightFlorida.com).

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