

Women seek healthier Sedgwick Co.

BY KAREN SHIDELER
The Wichita Eagle

Three Wichitans will head to Atlanta later this month with the hope of making Sedgwick County a healthier place to live.

Mim Wilkey of the Greater Wichita YMCA, Sonja Armbruster of the Sedgwick County Health Department, and Suzie Ahlstrand of the Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce will join representatives from nine other communities.

They were chosen for a program called Achieve — Action Communities for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change — sponsored by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors and the YMCA of the USA.

The program pairs health departments and YMCAs in each community.

Wilkey and Armbruster say they won't take preconceived notions about what should be done in Sedgwick County when they go to the meeting Feb. 25-26 at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Instead, they hope to find out about research, tools and grant opportunities that might help the county take the next step for-

ward in health.

Organizers of the Achieve program were surprised to find out that the area already has a Health and Wellness Coalition, started four years ago by a group of organizations that includes nonprofits, gyms and government, Wilkey said.

The coalition, which Wilkey and Armbruster are part of, promotes physical activity and good nutrition through a monthly newsletter, workplace wellness programs, a Healthy School Award and other efforts.

The Atlanta meeting will help the three women start figuring out "what we need and how we can expand," Wilkey said.

In June, they'll be joined by seven other community leaders for a trip to Alexandria, Va.,

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where they'll develop an action plan for making Sedgwick County a healthier community — meaning one that's a good place to live.

The Alexandria meeting also will involve 10-member teams from the other communities: Black Hawk County, Iowa; Maine's Mount Desert Island; Albuquerque; Cattaraugus County, N.Y.; Cleveland

County, N.C.; Stark County, Ohio; Allentown, Pa.; Houston; and Tacoma, Wash.

The effort "is totally the opposite of making us do something," Armbruster said. "This is about choices," she said.

That includes some things already in place that offer invitations for physical activity or healthy eating: bike paths along the river, farmers markets, community gardens and parks.

Wilkey and Armbruster said they hope to hear from members of the community, just as community involvement has shaped other initiatives such as the Dream in Green workshops on the future of Wichita parks.

For example, Wilkey said, her hairdresser told her that Wichita is a healthy community because of places like Sedgwick County Park — but it needs a similar park on the east side of town.

"This is the time to start hearing ideas," she said.

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SHARE YOUR IDEAS

Comments about what would help make Wichita a healthier community can be submitted through the Health and Wellness Coalition of Wichita's Web site. Go to www.hwcwichita.org and click on "Share Your Ideas."



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