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Local

Is Laughlin a healthy place to live?

Tuesday, October 29, 2013 3:49 PM PDT

UNCE leads discussion of community's positive and negative impacts

By JULIE FAIRMAN, Laughlin Nevada Times

LAUGHLIN — Members of the community and representatives of the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension program gathered together Oct. 17 to discuss the results of the Health Eating Active Living: Mapping Attributes Using Participatory Photographic Surveys - also known as HEAL MAPPS - conducted in the spring. The focus of the program is to identify positive and negative aspects of life in this rural community that enable or restrict a healthy lifestyle.

Laughlin participants in the HEAL MAPPS project generated 10 maps - which represent routes they travelled by foot, bicycle, car and public transit - and photographed 140 features of the community they feel contribute to healthy living and physical activity.

Utilizing hand-held devices that conveyed responses to UNCE Extension Educator Debbie Marcusson, who facilitated the gathering, 40 percent of the meeting participants said they feel that childhood obesity in Laughlin is of moderate concern.

In Nevada, 33.2 percent of all children are overweight compared with 30 percent nationally. In general terms, childhood obesity is more prevalent in rural communities, Marcusson said.

Fifty-seven percent of those in attendance Oct. 17 said they feel the community does not have adequate resources to help community members eat healthy and be physically active.

Various areas of the Colorado River Heritage Greenway Park and Trails were photographed during the spring mapping project. The general consensus of the Oct. 17 gathering was that while the park is an asset to the community, there are factors that prohibit its use, particularly the lack of public transportation to the facility and the extreme daytime temperatures during the summer months.

On the positive side, the established trails provide for easy walking, the views are wonderful and there are water fountains available for people and their pets.

Mountain View Park was photographed for the project, as well. Positive comments about that facility included its accessibility to individuals of all physical abilities, the attractive landscaping and the designated trails. The splash pad for the kids and the established sporting areas were praised by those in attendance, as well.

Lack of public transportation directly to the facility, however, was mentioned as a detraction.

Accolades were given, as well, to Spirit Mountain Activity Center, where community members of all ages can participate in a variety of activities, including tennis and soccer lessons for kids, a bocce ball league for adults and stretch-band classes for seniors.

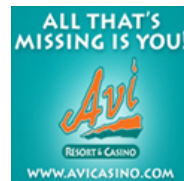
During the Oct. 17 meeting, 36 percent of those in attendance said they felt that Laughlin's community leaders are mildly engaged in efforts to promote weight-healthy kids and families, while another 36 percent said community leaders were not at all engaged in that effort. Eighteen percent said the community's leaders are moderately engaged in efforts to promote weight-healthy kids and families, and nine percent said those leaders are very engaged.

Sixty percent of those same respondents said that they are moderately confident that the individuals in Laughlin who provide programs, services and activities and who establish policies have expertise and training in healthy eating and physical activity.

The Laughlin Aquatic Center was photographed as an obstacle to a healthy lifestyle because it is open only three to four months a year. Trey Smith, recreation specialist for representing CCPR, replied that lack of funding is the main reason the pool is not open year-



Trey Smith, recreation specialist with Clark County Parks and Recreation, discusses the various programs that are available in Laughlin. JULIE FAIRMAN/Laughlin Nevada Times



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- 5th annual Cruizin' on the River at the Riverside Resort and Casino - Thursday, Jan. 16, through Sunday, Jan. 19.
- A reception for Artist James Walser at the Laughlin Library - Sunday, Jan. 19, from 1 - 2:30 p.m.
- Andrew Witzel, of the Northern Arizona Veterans Support Center, at Sunridge Village, 839 Landon Drive in BHC, to discuss the Veterans Aid and Attendance Pension Benefit - today, Jan. 15, beginning at 1:30 p.m. MST.

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round. The cost to heat the pool and the lack of qualified lifeguards during the winter months are the two main reasons the facility is closed in the winter, he said.

Directly related to healthy eating is the availability of wholesome foods. At least one member of the spring mapping committee photographed Aldape's Market. Positive comments related to the availability of fresh fruit and produce, as well as a wide selection of fresh meats and the fact that the store is open 24 hours a day. Negative comments related to the higher prices for those same products.

The restaurants in upper Laughlin were mentioned as potentially negative to a healthy lifestyle, although wholesome choices are available. It was suggested that listing nutritional information on the menus - caloric content, fat and sodium levels - could assist individuals in making better choices.

The group's response was evenly split when asked how supportive community members are in efforts to promote healthy eating and lifestyle activities: Fifty percent said they are not supportive at all, while the other half said they are mildly supportive.

Eldon Thayer said, "The kids nowadays think everything's got to be organized and ready for them. They don't use their imagination to create their own activities and stuff. We used to have to play our own games and make them up, and that's not going on anymore."

Patricia Hayde said she recently began attending the school athletic competitions. "I was surprised by the number of senior citizens who show up at those things," she said. "At least they support the physical activity that is going on at the schools. Many of the people I see at the games do not have children or grandchildren participating."

Finally, 60 percent of those in attendance at the Oct. 17 meeting said they would be willing to work for changes in the community to make it easier for children and families to eat healthy and be physically active. Twenty percent said they are not at all willing to participate in that effort, and another 20 percent said they would absolutely be willing to participate.

Marcusson ended the meeting by explaining that the results of it and the mapping surveys would be placed into report form, the results of which will be used by UNCE and other partners, such as CCPR, to promote change, educate the community and, possibly, obtain grant funding.

"It's all a matter of moving forward," she said.

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