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News

Trenton has state's fattest kids

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TRENTON — The fattest kids in Jersey live in Trenton.

According to a study conducted by Rutgers' Center for State Health Policy, city kids fight a major battle of bulge with about half labeled overweight, obese or very obese.

Trenton ranked first for kids ages 3-19 with a whopping 47.3 percent, ahead of New Brunswick (46.4), Newark (44.2), Vineland (43.6) and Camden (39.8).

That's why representatives from faith, civic, state, city and private sectors met yesterday and discussed ways to reverse the weighty epidemic during Isles' Faith For Health Breakfast.

Community leaders assembled at the Marriott Hotel said Trenton kids face an epidemic of obesity and health-related issues. Steven Board, Isles Inc. director of events and community partnerships, said this is Part II of a discussion that began last year. "We have to continue talking about the issue of obesity, especially as it pertains to the city of Trenton. Our kids are ranked near the top of most obesity charts. This is an epidemic," he said.

Isles sponsors mall walks throughout winter months in which participants do loops around Quaker Bridge Mall in Lawrence. A "Trenton Spirit Walk" on May 1, attracts hundreds of participants in a stroll through Cadwalader Park.

Trenton health agencies, churches and business face significant challenges in soda and fast food. Poor nutrition and lack of exercise explain Trenton's last-place ranking in the childhood obesity study.

Peri Nearon, director of Nutrition and Fitness at the Department of Health and Senior Services, explained a correlation between poverty and obesity.

"Many low-income families have less access to healthy food like fruits and vegetables. They are more expensive and less accessible. In those situations we find higher rates of obesity, especially among children," Nearon said.

Nearon stressed good health through a change in eating habits as opposed to diet fixes.

Connie Ellis of Union Baptist Church discussed an effort by her church to lose a combined 1,000 pounds. "So far we've lost about 200 pounds, not the number that we wanted at this point," she said.

Ellis blamed the minimal success on snowstorms.

"We weren't able to get outside and exercise. A lot of people were stuck inside and ate foods that they shouldn't have. That's why we extended our goal by two weeks. Most of our members are focused on eating habits and behaviors," Ellis said.

Floyd Morris, president of Children's Futures, asked attendees not to overlook the emotional side of overeating.

"It's a very tough issue, but we need to think about depression when we talk about obesity," Morris said.

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