

CITY OF ST. LOUIS: HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING

Initiatives, Programs and Outreach

St. Louis is a City on the move, increasingly featuring initiatives that promote active, healthy living. Along with key organizations from around the region, St. Louis is creating new, visible programs highlighting physical activity and distributing targeted literature illustrating the importance of exercise and diet. Because both eating habits and physical activity work together to advance the health of our region, the City's focus is centered on encouraging physical activity, improving individual eating habits and reforming our regional food system. Fledgling community gardens, well-established partnerships, budding City initiatives and future planning efforts are all working toward this goal – and accomplishing a lot.

ENCOURAGING ACTIVE LIVING

In past years, the City of St. Louis has often played a supporting role in encouraging healthy, active living. However, starting in 2010, it is taking a lead position. For the first year ever, the City is host to four cyclovia events called **Open Streets**. These events close five miles of City streets to vehicles and open them to residents for recreational use. Nutrition education, physical activity instruction, health demonstrations and bike safety lessons are some of the free programming offered at these events. Participation is growing and the City intends to continue this programming in the future. Last year, the City opened a state-of-the-art LEED-certified recreation center in the south of St. Louis, with membership exceeding expectations. And, in August 2010, the City broke ground on a second recreation center in the north. Not to be outdone by the new fitness facilities anchoring the far-ends of the City, recreation centers throughout the City underwent significant renovations and now feature modern amenities. At its seven swimming pools and eight fitness centers, the City's Recreation Division runs youth camps in the summer and sponsors kids sports all year long.

And the City is continuing its transformation – signing Complete Streets legislation this spring and, with ARRA Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant money, planning to maintain 100 miles of bike lanes and launch a public commuter bike station in downtown St. Louis.

By enhancing its recreation centers, orchestrating programming such as Open Streets, and allocating funds for bike lane construction and maintenance, the City is capitalizing on the public's desire to get fit. In recognition of these efforts, the City was recently designated a

St. Louis is Healthy and On the Move!

- ✦ Encouraging Physical Activity
- ✦ Improving Individual Eating Habits
- ✦ Targeting Childhood Obesity
- ✦ Enhancing Access to Healthy Foods
- ✦ Providing Educational Outreach
- ✦ Reforming Regional Food System



“Bicycle-Friendly Community” citing its extensive network of bike paths, clearly marked bike lanes along many major thoroughfares and wayfinding signage directing riders to key local attractions as all award-worthy enhancements.

Recognizing the impact it can make on its own workforce, the City’s Health Department partnered with Charter Communications in launching the program **“Get Hooked on Health”**. This endeavor encourages City residents of all ages to embrace better nutrition, increased physical activity, and improved health. The program’s outreach efforts include a website with various valuable health-resources and an annual, well-attended health fair in downtown St. Louis. This effort, now known as “Smart Living”, includes a television program highlighting health-related information that is broadcasted through the City’s cable station. The Health Department also partners with BJC HealthCare to bring the popular “Bee-Fit” campaign to City employees. The program encourages City employees to take responsibility for their health, offers personalized health assessments, orchestrates City challenges and oversees ongoing specialized outreach.

In addition to City-led efforts, organizations from around the region are committed to making our City and region more livable and more active. Trailnet, a non-profit organization with a 20-year history of promoting active living, offers programming “to encourage people to integrate physical activity into their daily routines” and helps regional communities in developing plans and policies that promote walking and bicycling. To this end, Trailnet is coordinating a discussion with regional organizations and municipalities, asking them to collaborate under the title “Livable St. Louis Network” to adopt model transportation and land-use policies aimed at creating livable, walkable communities here in the St. Louis region - communities that, by design, will make us healthier and more active. Meaningful discussions have already taken place and public support is high – as demonstrated by the sizeable attendance drawn by the 3rd Annual **Livable St. Louis Conference**.

FAMILY FRIENDLY OPPORTUNITIES

The non-profit, GO! St. Louis, encourages “individuals and families in the region to adopt a healthy lifestyle by getting fit, staying active, and eating a nutritional diet year round”. The organization is host to a variety of fitness events, coordinates an impressive outreach campaign, and develops programming throughout the region. However, GO! St. Louis is most recognized for its **Family Fitness Weekend**, held in April each year where 23,000 participants compete in the marathon, half marathon, marathon relay, 5K run/walk, children’s fun run and the mature mile. As Missouri’s biggest fitness event, the Family Fitness Weekend provides an excellent model for communities wanting to inspire residents to make health and wellness a top priority. In addition to GO! St. Louis, the City collaborates with many other agencies and charities in coordinating marathons, walks and bike races – and participation is high.

Great Rivers Greenway is well underway with its development of “an interconnected system of **greenways, parks and trails**” called the River Ring “that will encircle the St. Louis region, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors”. Eventually, this interconnected network will encompass 600 miles of trails and more than 45 greenways

throughout the region providing residents easy access to the network of trails, greenways and bike routes.

PARKS AND URBAN GREEN SPACES

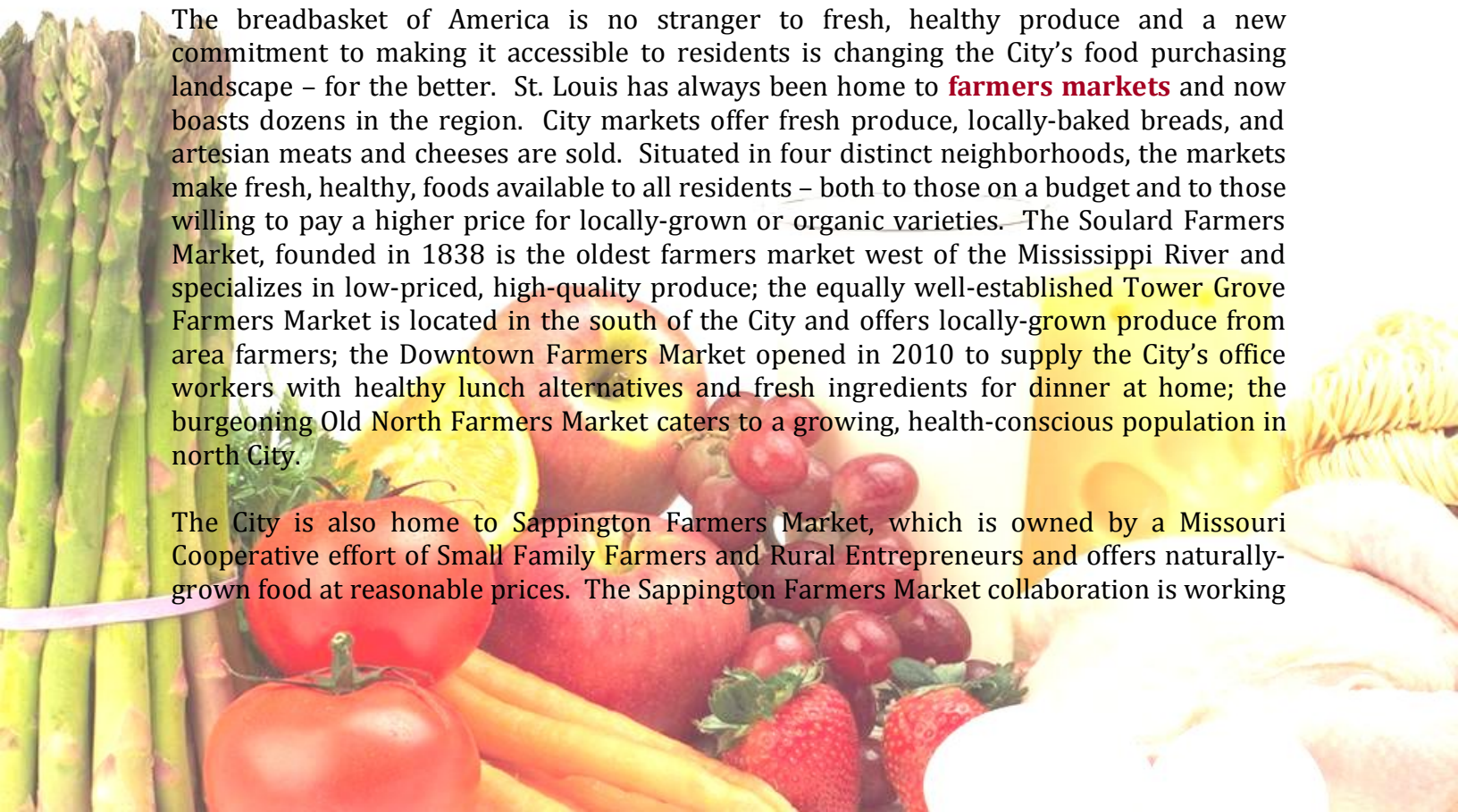
With growing public enthusiasm for events highlighting physical activity and with greater demand for **outdoor space to exercise**, the City is taking note. To provide more places for residents to be physically active outdoors, St. Louis is enhancing its existing commons and creating new “green spaces”. Citygarden is the newest addition to the scores of parks scattered throughout the City. A veritable oasis in the center downtown’s Gateway Mall, Citygarden boasts a pleasing blend of native plantings, internationally renowned sculptures, delightful fountains, and a number of sustainability features. Teeming with kids, office workers, and families throughout the day, **Citygarden** is a focal point of downtown and truly lives up to its name. While Citygarden is downtown’s stunning attraction, the City’s smaller parks are arguably the hearts of St. Louis neighborhoods. Over one hundred community parks provide green space for residents to enjoy, use for recreational activities and gather for events.

Just as these small parks are the hearts of City neighborhoods, **Forest Park** is the soul of the City. More than 12 million residents and visitors travel to Forest Park each year. At 1,293 acres, it is approximately 500 acres larger than Central Park in New York and is the home to the region’s major cultural institutions—the Zoo, Art Museum, History Museum, Science Center and the Muny Opera, many of which offer free admission and have **children’s programming**. Forest Park also serves as an outdoor sports center with facilities for golf, tennis, baseball, bicycling, boating, fishing, handball, ice skating, jogging, rugby and more.

PROVIDING ACCESS TO FRESH, HEALTHY FOODS

The breadbasket of America is no stranger to fresh, healthy produce and a new commitment to making it accessible to residents is changing the City’s food purchasing landscape – for the better. St. Louis has always been home to **farmers markets** and now boasts dozens in the region. City markets offer fresh produce, locally-baked breads, and artisan meats and cheeses are sold. Situated in four distinct neighborhoods, the markets make fresh, healthy, foods available to all residents – both to those on a budget and to those willing to pay a higher price for locally-grown or organic varieties. The Souldard Farmers Market, founded in 1838 is the oldest farmers market west of the Mississippi River and specializes in low-priced, high-quality produce; the equally well-established Tower Grove Farmers Market is located in the south of the City and offers locally-grown produce from area farmers; the Downtown Farmers Market opened in 2010 to supply the City’s office workers with healthy lunch alternatives and fresh ingredients for dinner at home; the burgeoning Old North Farmers Market caters to a growing, health-conscious population in north City.

The City is also home to Sappington Farmers Market, which is owned by a Missouri Cooperative effort of Small Family Farmers and Rural Entrepreneurs and offers naturally-grown food at reasonable prices. The Sappington Farmers Market collaboration is working



toward opening a second store in St. Louis which would include a rooftop greenhouse, an on-site garden, and a mid-sized food processing plant.

Programs, such as a “Fruit My Cube”, a service from neighboring Belleville Farmers Market **delivers fresh produce** – some locally-grown – right to your office, and make it easier for residents to make healthy, affordable eating choices. And, because a portion of every purchase goes to *Taste Buds*, a national initiative focused on cultivating healthy eating habits at schools, the program carries additional benefits for our youth. The Mayor’s Office is encouraging City staff to join the service by offering a centralized pick-up location and providing outreach materials.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Converting vacant land into productive **community gardens** is transforming parts of our City. At the helm of this effort is Gateway Greening, a local non-profit that promotes “urban neighborhood vitality and stability, healthy living and quality of life through community food projects, education and wellness programs, and civic greening”. Under its direction, close to 200 community gardens blanket the region, making healthy food more accessible to residents and providing a concrete connection to our environment. Gateway Greening partners with other agencies in several other greening and **community-building initiatives**. Most notably, “City Seeds” provides job training, therapy through horticulture, and nutrition education for at-risk individuals. City Seeds provides a distinct social service while producing locally grown fresh food and serving as a resource for community education, sustainable urban agriculture and food security.



Because of the success of these programs and the increased interest in small-scale urban agriculture, the City is focused on the health benefits, economic development advantages and environmental improvements that urban agriculture can generate. To support and enhance these efforts, the City is identifying opportunities that will encourage and improve other **urban farming initiatives**. As an initial step toward this goal, the City is inventorying its own stock of community gardens and urban farms, evaluating its potential for locating new agricultural facilities in areas of the City that may qualify as food deserts, and researching methods to improve small-scale food distribution.

COMBATING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

In instituting an overarching health and wellness policy and establishing advisory councils to ensure its enactment, the St. Louis Public School District is leading the way in raising a healthier generation. Directly in line with **Michelle Obama's Lets Move!** campaign, St. Louis schools are tackling the issue of childhood obesity by offering healthier food in schools, improving access to nutritious fruits and vegetables, and increasing physical activity. Inventive curriculum and hands-on educational programming engage students and encourage **healthy eating habits** and increased physical activity. Both local and national programs stressing the importance of exercise were introduced in City schools last year, including Academics in Movement (AIM), Brain Gym, GO! St. Louis' Read, Right, Run, University of Missouri Extension's Show Me Nutrition Program, and the Ram's NFL Play 60. Chartwell-Thompson's, the District's foodservice provider, has monthly educational classes with titles such as Focus on Breakfast, National Nutrition Month, International Fruit Week, and Celebrate Local Flavor. These classes are designed to teach kids about the importance of healthy eating and to reconnect youth to their food.

Currently, twenty-five St. Louis Public Schools have active vegetable and ornamental gardens funded by Gateway Greening, where students learn how to grow vegetables and reap the rewards of **fresh, healthy snacks**. In the 2010-11 school year, six schools will participate in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The program uses creative methods to introduce fresh fruits and vegetables as healthy snack options to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

With plans to implement new initiatives, enhance the curriculum, expand specific programs, and continue physical fitness assessments, our City schools are well on the way to expanding their role in providing quality nutrition, integrating physical activity during the school day, and **teaching children** about the importance of embracing a healthy active lifestyle.

Partners such as BJC HealthCare, Healthy Youth Partnership, St. Louis Rams, Washington University School of Medicine and many other organizations work hard to address childhood obesity in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Most notably, Healthy Youth Partnership, a consortium of dozens of different agencies, has played a key role in establishing the area's first Food Policy Council and organizing the first regional Food Summit. Charged with the mission to eliminate youth obesity through programs that promote healthy eating and active living in the St. Louis region, the **Healthy Youth Partnership** is pursuing opportunities to develop, advocate and support the implementation of policies addressing youth obesity and to coordinate and support the efforts of HYP Partner organizations. With these goals in mind, the Healthy Youth Partnership is leveraging its collective power and making significant strides in tackling the issue of childhood obesity.

