



Couple recognized nationally for healthy community project

By TIM LATSHAW - OBSERVER Staff Writer

6/17/2007 - CHERRY CREEK — Walking brought Bruce and Brenda Hendricks to Seattle and back.

OK, they actually flew there, but it was their involvement in setting up a hometown walking program that got their community moving and sent them to Seattle for national recognition.

The Hendricks recently returned from a ceremony held by the Centers for Disease Control where they were one of six recipients nationwide of the 2007 Steps Community Heroes Award.

The award recognizes contributions made by individuals in support of the CDC-coordinated "Steps to a HealthierUS" program, which provides funding to more than 40 Steps "communities" throughout the country ranging from cities to entire counties. Chautauqua County is considered one such community and one of four counties in the state that participates in the program.

Members of the Cherry Creek Business and Community Association, Bruce and Brenda Hendricks, received recognition by organizing and securing funding for a healthy addition to the ongoing Cherry Creek Memorial Park project.

Over the past several years and with funding provided through legislators and arts councils, the memorial park next to the village hall has steadily taken shape. A veterans monument was erected in front of the village hall and a gazebo, lighting and trees were placed in the semi-secluded area behind it.

According to Cheri Foti, program coordinator for the Chautauqua County Steps program, the Hendricks were forwarded information on the Steps "Community on the Move" initiative through a suggestion from Chautauqua County Legislator Steve Kimball.

"What we wanted was a permanent environmental change that could sustain physical activity here forever," Foti said.

The Hendricks submitted a package with the idea of creating a walking area in the memorial park and received \$3,000 in "seed" money to get started.

The path isn't just for looks, however. A requirement for the funding was to organize a community walking program. The initial goal was to have 15 participants, but area residents put their shoes where the pavement is and a group nearly 10 times as large was formed. Participants recorded their steps on pedometers and sent the data to the Steps program for tracking. Goals were set to walk the total mileage to several other "Cherry Creeks" in the country, such as in Colorado, and more than 34 million steps were logged. Around the same time, elementary students at Pine Valley were engaging in activity initiatives of their own alongside their neighbors'.

Under the organizational skills of the Hendricks, the community has gathered together not only to work toward better fitness but also to lay out the walking path, beautify and maintain the park. Foti submitted these accomplishments to a CDC panel who chose the Hendricks' as a national reward recipient.

Chautauqua County Executive Gregory Edwards said he was not surprised to see such a collaborative effort in a smaller community, where he feels neighbor outreach and connections are conducive to projects such as this.

"It's just taking that little bit of a seed and investing it or planting it and having it show growth," he said.

The Hendricks received a glass award at the CDC ceremony in Seattle, as well as recognition from the county and Congressman Brian Higgins. They thanked the community for all the support they have given to the park and health projects as well as officials who have helped fund them along the way. The walking path is open for use, but more additions are still expected for the entire park.

"We thought this would be nice for someone who wanted to be off the street and have a lighted path at night," Brenda Hendricks said. "We hope to enhance it with flowers and benches and we're going to add tables, grills, things like that. Eventually we hope to have a walking path from the monument back to another monument remembering people who served in the Air Force and such."

For more information on the Chautauqua County Steps to a HealthierNY Program, visit www.ccsteps.org.

Comments on this article may be sent to editorial@observertoday.com



OBSERVER Photo by Tim Latshaw

County Executive Gregory Edwards and Chautauqua County Steps for a HealthierNY Program Director Cheri Foti honor award winners Bruce Hendricks and Brenda Hendricks beneath the gazebo at Cherry Creek Memorial Park. The Hendricks' were recently honored by the CDC for their involvement in constructing a walking path in the park.

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