

# The Milan Standard

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## CRI helping local residents on the road to future better health

Sullivan County residents are on the road to better health thanks to a surprising partnership created through Health Literacy Missouri.

Sullivan County Memorial Hospital is getting help from health experts at the non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute (CRI) in Arizona. A local team of health and community leaders have been trained by CRI experts and will work with 100 people in the Sullivan County area, teaching them a 12-week wellness education program developed at the institute.

The Life Enhancement Program, founded in 1988, takes a holistic approach to improving health and health literacy with interactive classes and activities, one-on-one counseling, cooking demonstrations and grocery shopping excursions.

Leaders hope the program will change the mindset of the entire town, sparking a community-wide effort to improve health literacy, nutrition and increase physical activity, reduce stress and prevent chronic disease for local residents.

A 2007 study conducted by Sullivan County found that 23 percent of residents surveyed reported poor or fair health status, and 30 percent reported being overweight. More than three-fourths reported not consuming the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, and more than 20 percent suffer from high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels. One in ten residents has diabetes.

"We are a poor community," said Amy Michael, CEO of Sullivan County Memorial Hospital. "If you look at the stats for the State of Missouri, we are at the lower end on all of them – diabetes, obesity, just everything. We need to do something."

Community leaders, clergy, a school nurse, a banker, representatives from the area's largest employers, grocery store owners, and members of the large Hispanic population in the county have shown interest in participating in the program.

The program is part of the efforts of the Canyon Ranch Institute, led by the 17th Surgeon General of the United States, Richard H. Carmona, to transfer best practices of the world famous Canyon Ranch, known for its

wealthy and celebrity clientele, to underserved communities in an effort to prevent, diagnose, and address chronic disease.

"I am so excited the first group of 20 participants will be starting on June 17th," Michael said. "The team leaders have done a great job telling the community about the program and the community has responded positively to it."

"If I could make one goal for the program, it's for the 100 participants to take information they learn back into their homes and start taking the small steps to living a healthier life," said Michael. "Then, when other family members and friends see them living healthier, hopefully they will want to as well.

"Remember, this is just not a 12-week program," she said. "It is the beginning of the journey to living healthier and happier."

Earlier this year, a team of 13 physicians, nurse practitioners, a dietician, exercise, behavioral and spirituality professionals associated with the hospital received training at the Canyon Ranch Institute.

That team will start work with the first group of 20 residents this month. Four more groups of 20 will follow, learning everything from how to read nutrition labels and use household items for resistance training to how to follow basic relaxation techniques, read a medical chart, and know what questions to ask the doctor.

The Sullivan County Memorial Hospital-Canyon Ranch Institute Life Enhancement Program is the first in the nation to focus on implementing the practices at Canyon Ranch to a rural population. A similar project focused on an urban area in the South Bronx has seen success in participants losing weight, becoming less depressed, reducing blood pressure and improving health literacy.

The Life Enhancement Program in Sullivan County was started with a grant from the Missouri Foundation of Health and is one of 26 health literacy demonstration projects overseen by Health Literacy Missouri, a non-profit based in St. Louis that is also funded by MFH.

Improving health literacy is especially important in a community like Sullivan County,



**TRAINING FOR THE CORE TEAM MEMBERS** of the CRI LEP in Sullivan County included the Where's the Joy? session that reconnects participants to the relaxed feelings that result from doing simple and fun activities. (March 26, 2010, Milan MO, © Canyon Ranch Institute, Andrew Pleasant, photographer)

which has a higher poverty rate, lower high school graduation rate and higher Latino population than the rest of the state. Due to those factors, many Sullivan County residents are likely to have lower health literacy, are less likely to use available health resources and may experience multiple linguistic and cultural barriers.

Low health literacy can result in unfavorable health outcomes, underutilization of preventative services, limited disease management skills, increased hospitalizations, and higher mortality rates.

The team will continue to work with the Canyon Ranch Institute to remain current on best health and wellness practices. The project's success will be measured and evaluated and the data shared with key stakeholders. The goal will be to find a way to sustain the program long-term and possibly replicate it in other areas in Missouri.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for the Sullivan County community, the local trainers and the 100 participants that will benefit from the project by making long lasting changes to improve their health," said Martha Gragg, a lifelong Milan resident and Vice President for Program at the Missouri Foundation For Health. "It is rare for a rural community of this size to be fortunate enough to have a project developed with the expertise of the Canyon Ranch Institute and supported by the 17th U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Richard Carmona."