

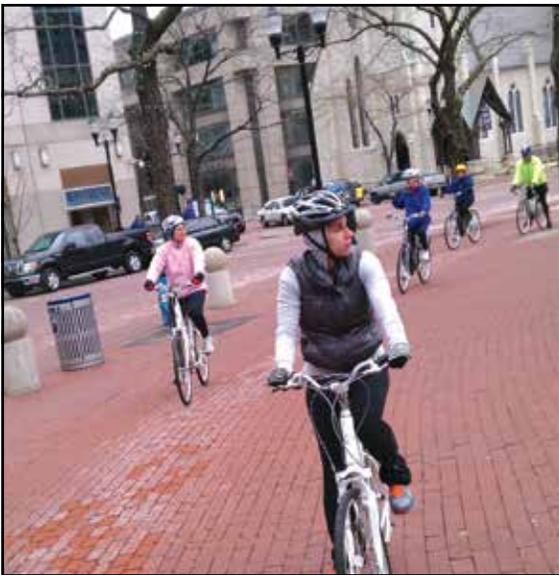
# Wellness Team Effort

## Collaborations Emphasize Culture

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” – Helen Keller*

**Top 10 by 2025 Coalition partners “circle” downtown Indianapolis during an ActiveIndy Bike Tour.**



**Promoting locally grown food is a key objective of the Healthy Communities Partnership of Southwest Indiana. Seton Harvest, located in Evansville, is part of the initiative.**



It all boils down to culture.

It's nearly impossible to stimulate widespread change without community buy-in. That especially holds true when it comes to inspiring healthy behaviors. Building a successful wellness culture is the key to opening doors, building momentum and making an impact. But where to begin?

Collaborate. Collaborate. Collaborate.

Whet your appetite for wellness and camaraderie with these morsels as we highlight community efforts (among many across the state) striving to enhance residents' health and quality of life.

### Eye on the prize

*Top 10 by 2025 initiative*

“Celebrate small victories.”

That could be the unofficial mantra of the Top 10 by 2025 initiative, launched by the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis and a variety of community partners to make Central Indiana one of the nation's 10 healthiest communities by 2025.

“Top 10 by 2025 is geared toward increasing physical activity, improving nutrition, decreasing smoking and enhancing the wellness environment,” remarks Chuck Gillespie, executive director of the Wellness Council of Indiana (a Top 10 by 2025 Coalition partner). “It's about creating a collaborative environment to inspire people.”

The impetus was an alarming ranking – 45 out of 50 – on the American College of Sports Medicine's 2011 American Fitness Index. Indiana was represented by the 10-county metropolitan statistical area of Indianapolis-Carmel.

The annual report measures health and community fitness for the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Criteria include preventive health behaviors, levels of chronic disease conditions, health care access and community resources.

Indianapolis inched up two spots to 43 in 2012, but dropped back down to 45 this year.

Gillespie contends that the setback shouldn't overshadow recent progress, including passage of local and statewide smoking bans and a Complete Streets ordinance (which promotes safe transportation access for pedestrians, bicyclists and others).

“Indiana has a lot of the resources it needs in order to attain a higher rate than 45th,” he stresses. “It's a matter of changing the culture and overall attitude toward physical activity and healthier living.”

### Something for everyone

*Healthy Communities Partnership of Southwest Indiana*

It's never too early – or too late – to develop healthy wellness habits.

Just ask Andrea Hays, project director for a \$3 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that promotes wellness at all stages of life.

“We believe that if we can transform the perception as well as the actual culture of the way people live that it's only going to help our region,” she asserts. “It's going to create opportunities for economic development, sustainability and quality of life.”

Welborn Baptist Foundation, located in Evansville, received funding for the two-year project on behalf of the Healthy Communities Partnership of Southwest Indiana. The initiative focuses on promoting tobacco-free living, active living and healthy eating, clinical preventive services, and healthy and safe physical environments.

Among the activities: Elementary school teachers are blending physical activity (tapping, marching) and academics through the national TAKE 10! program. Youth are playing a role in promoting smoke-free communities. “Corporate Champions” are receiving training on how to cultivate successful workplace wellness cultures.

“The biggest impact we’re seeing at this point is that we’re all speaking the same language,” Hays comments. “We have a consistent message. We’re getting the word out.”

### ‘Trash to treasure’

*Heritage Trail of Madison*

Bob Greene isn’t afraid to get his hands dirty.

In 2007, he began leading efforts to clean up a neglected industrial site strewn with scrap, appliances and other litter. Today, Heritage Trail in historic Madison is a popular attraction for fitness and nature lovers.

Greene – who serves as president and executive director of the Heritage Trail Conservancy – fondly refers to the project as a “trash to treasure” story.

“A lot of our mission has been cleaning up the greenways – working not only on public, but also on private properties,” he explains. “Along the way, different volunteers would come along. That’s the sweetness of the story.”

Recent expansions offer new educational, health and quality of life opportunities. Among the most notable was the purchase of riverfront land (now called Heritage Park) through state funding and donations. Spanning nearly 10 acres, it boasts walking trails, wildlife and, potentially, an interpretive river education center.

“Probably the highest percentage of people who use the Heritage Trail use it for fitness,” Greene observes. “It’s a very demanding physical regimen to walk the whole trail. They could do the same thing on city sidewalks, but this is a more natural setting.

“We have an opportunity to create the most distinctive trail system in the Midwest. It has great potential. There have been a lot of partners that have made (tremendous progress) possible, and I feel privileged that I’ve been involved.”

### Team spirit

*Fort4Fitness*

Fort4Fitness, a Fort Wayne nonprofit formed in 2007, has taken the idea of healthy living and run with it.



**The Heritage Trail in Madison currently spans two miles, but eventually will stretch to 13 as part of a long-term expansion.**

The annual Fort4Fitness Fall Festival in downtown Fort Wayne features walks, marathons and an expo.

“We have about 10,000 participants, but end up with almost 25,000 people that are either part of the cheering that goes on at the course or gather at the minor league (baseball) stadium where we have the finish line,” shares executive director Brad Kimmel. “We have over 1,200 people who volunteer to make this happen.

“Our goal of reaching people and helping them get off the couch continues to grow. We embrace the serious runner, but our real goal is to help the couch potato. We develop good habits that create this tremendous hype.”

But fitness isn’t a once-a-year event.

Renovation was recently completed on a 12,000-square-foot community fitness and activity center that promotes family-friendly fitness. It

includes a kitchen, classroom and exercise gymnasium.

“We’re trying to strengthen the community by saying, ‘We’re all in this together,’” Kimmel declares. “If the community wants to work together, some really neat things can happen.”



**Grand slam! Thousands of people cheer as participants cross the finish line at Parkview Field during the annual Fort4Fitness fall festival.**

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Chuck Gillespie, Wellness Council of Indiana, at [www.wellnessindiana.org](http://www.wellnessindiana.org)

**Top 10 by 2025 initiative** at [www.indymca.org](http://www.indymca.org)

**Andrea Hays, Healthy Communities Partnership of Southwest Indiana,** at [www.healthybyfive.org](http://www.healthybyfive.org)

**Bob Greene, Heritage Trail Conservancy,** at [www.heritagetrailconservancy.com](http://www.heritagetrailconservancy.com)

**Brad Kimmel, Fort4Fitness,** at [www.fort4fitness.org](http://www.fort4fitness.org)