



Ridgeland takes Top Honors as “Mississippi’s Healthiest Hometown!”

In 2013, the City of Ridgeland made significant strides in creating a culture of wellness for its residents, businesses and visitors, earning the title of “Mississippi’s Healthiest Hometown.” Ridgeland’s efforts were spearheaded by partnerships among schools, churches, businesses, civic organizations and local government officials. Through the efforts of Ridgeland’s Healthy Hometown Committee, every facet of the city is uniting to create a healthier environment to live and work.

Ridgeland is home to nearly 15 miles of recreation trails, giving it the distinction of having the most trail mileage of any other city in the state. The historic Natchez Trace Parkway passes through the heart of the city, giving bicyclists and runners a scenic backdrop in high-profile athletic events like the Heatwave Triathlon and the Natchez Trace Century Ride.



Its parks and recreation facilities are among some of the best in the state, hosting numerous award-winning events like KidFest! Ridgeland.



Local schools are working to instill healthy behaviors in the city’s youngest residents through a variety of programs and activities promoting fitness and obesity prevention.

Local businesses have developed worksite wellness programs that focus on identifying health risks and encouraging healthy behaviors like regular exercise, healthy eating and tobacco cessation.

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Ridgeland's faith-based community is taking a proactive stance in encouraging wellness through weight loss programs and a 5K training program.

The city is home to the Ridgeland Sow and Grow Community Garden, which provides fresh produce for residents with limited resources.

Farmers' markets and produce stands also offer fresh, seasonal and local produce to residents.

City leaders are taking advantage of technology through the Healthy Hometown Ridgeland website to promote fitness events, health news and profiles of residents committed to healthy living.

The Healthy Hometown Dish feature allows residents to find healthy dining options at local restaurants.

As "Mississippi's Healthiest Hometown" for 2013, the city plans to use the \$50,000 grant award to focus on

enhancing playground areas in local elementary schools, as well as provide incentives to schools for implementing healthy behaviors. The city also plans to further its "e" efforts to educate and engage residents on local wellness opportunities.



Starkville and Brookhaven Honored as Healthy Hometowns

The cities of Starkville and Brookhaven were honored as a Healthy Hometown for their respective population categories.

Since being named the "Mississippi's Healthiest Hometown" in 2011, the City of Starkville has continued its ambitious wellness efforts in the community, led by the Healthy Starkville Committee.

As a smoke free-municipality, Starkville continues to be a role model for other communities. Recent research shows the number of heart attacks in Starkville has decreased more than 27 percent since the ordinance was implemented.

Home to Mississippi State University, Starkville's efforts have extended beyond the confines of the city. On campus, Mississippi State University's Department of Health and Wellness promotes health to faculty, staff, students and members of the community. Most recently, its "MSU on the Move" initiative offered an all-encompassing approach to health education and wellness opportunities on campus and in the surrounding community.



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Local businesses are helping to ensure employees have access to healthy food options and area fitness events. Civic organizations continue to have a strong presence in the community, promoting programs like safety courses

for children and gardening projects with seniors.

With the \$25,000 grant award, Starkville plans to upgrade its parks and recreation areas and fund education, programming and awareness campaigns for various projects throughout the city.

The City of Brookhaven is making significant progress in creating a healthy living and working environment for its residents. Its Healthy Hometown Committee members share the common goal of providing citizens with plenty of opportunities to make healthy living a priority.

The Brookhaven School District developed its own wellness policy that has received national recognition and the district is incorporating physical activity in classrooms.

The City Park Multi-Use Trail gives Brookhaven residents a variety of opportunities to be active, from walking and jogging, to biking and more as the trails also boast five exercise stations.



Brookhaven is host to many fitness events and city employees enjoy free immunizations, health screenings, wellness center discounts and the opportunity to participate in health management programs.

Residents can readily access healthy eating options from many local restaurants and even find a variety of healthy snacks at local convenience stores. The **Brookhaven Farmers' Market** features local, seasonal produce along with additional specialty food items.



The city is using a website to promote wellness with a **"Healthy Activities"** section that features information about local fitness opportunities, **parks, recreation information, farmers' market** information and more.

Brookhaven plans to sustain its wellness efforts with the \$25,000 grant award by enhancing its parks and exercise equipment, promoting bicycle safety to kids and building a new walking trail.

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation established the Healthy Hometown Awards program in 2010 to encourage communities to promote healthy lifestyles and to provide financial rewards to those who demonstrate the most progress. The grants are used by the communities to further ongoing community wellness initiatives.

Universities Collaborate to Create Healthy Campus Cultures

Leaders from the state's public universities met on the campus of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi to collaborate on a University and College Health and Wellness Model. The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is partnering with Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, The University of Southern Mississippi and the University of Mississippi to share ideas and to develop best practices for implementing health and wellness cultures for **Mississippi's eight publicly-funded universities.**



campuses that extend into the surrounding communities and schools. The leadership committees overseeing the initiative at the universities will include city leaders, healthcare providers and school officials.

The University and College Health and Wellness Model was developed from the successful Healthy Campus/Community Initiative implemented at Delta State University. The model was conceived from the initial partnership between Delta State University and the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation and provides the basis for a focus on campus health and wellness.



The University and College Health and Wellness Model is built on the foundation of top-level university **leaders' support of** health and wellness cultures on

The initiative encourages universities to offer students classes on the importance of healthy eating and physical activity, with one-on-one guidance in developing and achieving personal health goals. Other elements of the initiative include the universities having tobacco-free campuses and providing access to opportunities for physical exercise, as well as healthy meal and snack options. The initiative will also extend into the surrounding communities and schools, providing opportunities for physical activity, health seminars and screenings and a community-wide smoke-free ordinance.

The universities were encouraged to continue their collaborative efforts as they submit their plans to implement healthy cultures, with a commitment of grant support from the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation.

Physical Education Leadership Summit

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation invited physical education leaders from across the state to a summit for the purpose of collaborating on best practices and program initiatives to motivate our Mississippi schools to help students become fit. The Physical Education Leadership Summit provided an opportunity for physical education teachers to share how they are working to create a culture of physical activity and fitness.

The summit also allowed the P.E. teachers to provide feedback on efforts the Foundation is making to continue supporting schools that previously received grants for health and fitness

programs. The summit provided a history of the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation to help the P.E. teachers understand the range of



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opportunities made available throughout the state.



The teachers participated in fitness activities designed for teaching K-8th grade students. The activities were high-intensity and used limited equipment.

The Physical Education Leadership Summit resulted in positive feedback for the Foundation to target the development of new programs and support efforts, and an opportunity for the P.E. teachers to expand on current practices and engage with other professionals.

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation will continue supporting schools in their efforts to help students become healthy. The Foundation will also continue to be a source of motivation to our P.E. teachers who are providing invaluable benefits to the health of our Mississippi students.



Early Head Start Students Learn about Healthy Eating

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation continues to support programs and services focusing on health initiatives targeting children. A recent grant to the Moore Community House Early Head Start program in Biloxi helped establish a community garden, which is providing fresh fruit and vegetables for children and their families. The garden is also providing opportunities to educate the children on the importance of healthy eating and to enjoy a variety of fresh produce.



"The goal of the community garden is to increase interest among the families, as well as the community at large by providing them with fresh fruits and vegetables," said Carol Burnett, Executive Director, Moore Community House. **"We want to encourage interest in growing fresh produce, cooking with fresh produce and incorporating the produce into their meals."**



For additional information about the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please visit our website at www.healthiermississippi.org.