

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

County of Luna

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 8/23/17
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Media Release

Partnerships with several local and statewide organizations have poised Healthy Kids, Healthy Luna County to take action on issues related to accessing healthy food and outdoor physical activity.

Trails, especially the world-famous Continental Divide Trail, are particular points of interest for the program. Staff with the VIVA Connects program out of the University of New Mexico's Prevention Research Center have put together Luna County's first electronic guide to local trails and parks. It is accessible through the Deming-Luna County Chamber of Commerce's "A Guide to Deming, New Mexico" app, which is available on Apple and Android smart phones.

"This map gives residents and visitors a clear idea of where local trails are located and where trails are planned to be installed in the future," Matt Robinson, HKHLC coordinator, explained. "Thanks to the hard work of the team at the PRC and the generosity of the Chamber, we now have an invaluable tool to promote outdoor activity."

Once inside the Deming app, select "DEMING, NM PARKS & TRAILS" to be taken to the digital map. In July, Jeff DeBellis, an associate scientist with the PRC's VIVA Connects team, visited Luna County and accompanied Robinson on a tour of the area. He then returned to UNM and worked with his team to complete the digital map.

"There is strong evidence that when people have access to places to walk and information about those places, they're more likely to be physically active. Brisk walking or other moderate physical activity just 2.5 hours each week can reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and certain types of cancer," DeBellis added.

He also suggested collaborating with the Continental Divide Trail Coalition to promote the Continental Divide Trail, the approximately 3,100-mile hike between the Canadian and Mexican borders. All three of the accepted starting/ending points for the trail are located in Southern New Mexico and one of which includes the village of Columbus. Robinson has reached out to local organizations, including village of Columbus government, to participate in a working group to plan promotions for the trail and any possible development needed to facilitate its use. The group first met on August 23. Contact him for more information or to be involved.

Outdoor activity is just one focus of Healthy Kids, which also works in more broad categories around schools, the food system and built environment. Members of public will have three opportunities to attend Healthy Kids meetings concerning gardening and community food

projects. The meetings are scheduled for 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 30 and 2 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 31. All meetings will be held in the Luna County Courthouse basement. The August 31 meeting will be in conjunction with the Growing Food Connections project, in which Luna County has participated for the last three years to promote the local food system.

The intention of the meetings is to have a discussion with members of the public around issues concerning food and to receive input on how the issues may be addressed. Robinson will also be gauging interest on how many people are interested in participating in backyard gardening programs in which they would be supplied with materials and instruction to grow their own fruits and vegetables. Refreshments will be served at all of the meetings.

Despite having a strong agricultural industry in the area, Luna County is considered a “food desert” by the United States Department of Agriculture, meaning there are a significant number of low-income residents without close access to grocery stores. Luna County has been working to address these issues through HKHLC, GFC and through participation on the regional Southwest Food Policy Council.

The efforts through HKHLC are made possible through funding provided by the Obesity, Nutrition and Physical Activity office in the New Mexico Department of Health. They have worked to support local and statewide efforts to reduce obesity and improve health of residents.

“Increasing and expanding opportunities for healthy eating and active living are two strategies that can help prevent obesity,” Rita Condon, manager of ONAPA at DOH, said. “Healthy Kids Luna County has brought together numerous partners and community members to make it easier for all Luna County residents to eat healthier foods and be more physical active. We’re proud to work with Luna County on improving community health.”

Contact (575) 543-6585 or matt_robinson@lunacountynm.us for more information or to get involved in Healthy Kids projects.

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