

Health Dept. grant funds innovative walking program

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By. Daniel Jackovino | Staff Writer

Bloomfield Department of Health has received a \$10,000 Grant from AARP to help continue its promotion of walking as a healthy lifestyle. The township is one of two communities in New Jersey to receive the Grant.

“We have been working on walkability for a while,” said assistant Health officer Maya Lordo.

The health department undertook a walking survey to determine the routes residents took, why they walked that route and the hazards they encountered. The survey was conducted by Rutgers and funded by Partners For Health.

“After that, we collaborated with NJ Bike and Walk Coalition,” Lordo said. “It’s an initiative to create an environment for biking and walking.”

The name of the initiative was called “Let’s Walk” and facilitated group walking by using an internet platform, “Let’s Meet Up.”

These group activities, Lordo said, worked out well. Once a walk was from a health department sponsored vegetable truck parked near the Civic Center. People would walk from there around the Green. Walkers would earn credits for fresh produce purchases.

“Let’s Walk” also partnered with the Morris Canal Society for historic canal tours. The third group walk is ongoing and takes place at Brookdale Park.

“The historic tour is unbelievably interesting,” Lordo said. “Residents should check it out.”

She said for the AARP Grant, the department wanted to encourage individual walkers. A program in Allentown, PA, called the “Million Clicks Campaign” caught its attention.

The Bloomfield “Million Clicks Campaign” will be in partnership with the NJ Bike and Walk Coalition. Installation of “job clocks” was to begin Saturday, November 17th, at seven different

locations around town. A walker will be able to “clock in” by using a special key fob they will receive when registering for the campaign.

“There will be three job clocks in Brookdale Park, two along the Moors Canal walks and two on the historic tour around the green,” Lordo said.

In a Township press release, Liz Brady, the “Let's Walk” coordinator for the NJ Bike and Walk Coalition, said the Coalition and the Health Department have group walks throughout the community.

“However, sometimes people's schedules do not allow them to join us.” she said. “The Million Clicks” program will provide the technology for these people to participate in our common goal.”

AARP funding will pay for the clocks. Registered fob walker's will also be entered into a raffle.

But if a fob carrying walker is inactive, the Health Department will request the fob be returned.

“It's a commitment,” Lordo said. “But having something on the chain as a reminder is helpful. And it also gives a sense of community.”

The kickoff for the Million Clicks Campaign is scheduled for January 15th, 2019.

“Register now,” Lordo advises. “There is a list. The date the fob can be picked up will be announced.”

She said the data collected will help the health department create more programs.

“We are basically creating an environmental change,” Lordo said.