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Press Release for Immediate Use

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Re: Safe Routes to School Pilot Project at Decorah Elementary School

Now that the weather is nice, it's time to get moving and get fit. It's also important to remind everyone about the many ways they can be both active and safe in their daily routines.

On Thursday, May 12th (rain date on May 13th), the Washington County Injury Prevention Coalition, the West Bend Police Department, and the Healthy People Project of Washington County (HPPWC) will team up with Decorah School to encourage kids to walk or ride their bikes to school. Students will sign a "Get Fit Pledge" committing to walk or bike 3-4 days per week for the next month. Anyone who signs the pledge can participate in a Bike & Pedestrian safety course at school on that day. Children needing helmets will be fitted and provided a new helmet at no charge. Children participating in the pilot will be eligible for weekly incentives. Those who complete the four week pilot will also have an opportunity to win a new bike which will be donated by Johnson Bus Company.

The pilot project at Decorah is the result of The Safe Routes to School Program that was introduced a year ago when Mark Fenton, a nationally known expert on pedestrian safety, was invited by the HPPWC to observe dismissal of the Decorah students. Mark presented his observations to a group of people including Health Department staff, law enforcement, city planners and school officials. This pilot will continue in the fall culminating with the Walk Your Child to School Day in October.

Walking and biking to school, even if only a 10 or 15 minute process, helps children get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity. There is evidence, both scientific and anecdotal, that children who exercise regularly perform better in the classroom, have fewer behavioral problems, and have higher test scores. Decreasing traffic around the schools increases student safety, air quality and saves money in transportation costs to parents and taxpayers.

Increasing physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables of Washington County residents are the two primary goals of the HPPWC, which was launched in 2007 in response to mounting local, state and national statistics, indicating an epidemic of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and orthopedic problems strongly associated with overweight and obesity. These diseases, at an alarming rate, are beginning in childhood and, for the first time in the history of our country we are facing the possibility that our children and grandchildren may have a shorter lifespan than our own. The burden is evident at every level: personal quality of life, increased health care costs and number of sick days absorbed by employers as well as workforce stability over the next several generations. Solutions are complex and will truly "take a village" to tackle. The collaborative effort of this pilot, along with the support of parents and staff of Decorah School, demonstrates one of the ways we can come together to make a difference.

A 2010 countywide Park & Trail Map, with all County & local parks and their amenities is available at most County government buildings, The Y (Kettle Moraine branches) and local chambers of commerce. For more information, go to <http://www.walktoschool.org/downloads/WTS-talking-points-2009.pdf> or <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/network/wisconsin>
www.getmovingwashingtoncounty.com
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tobacco/1398WIDHSRiskFactorReportFinal.pdf>