



Jane Charmelo

out & about

Chance meeting leads to mutual interest in childhood obesity prevention

Until they met at a Healthy Lombard February Fitness Fair, Nicki Klinkhamer and Dr. Elizabeth Moxley didn't know each other, but now, they have created a bond of sorts that is near and dear to Jay Wojcik's heart.

Wojcik is the founder and board president of the Healthy Lombard Foundation, and she explained that the two women recently participated at a consortium on childhood obesity, a cause which prompted her, and then Village President Bill Mueller, to talk some years ago about developing a non-profit to increase health awareness around the Lombard community.

Wojcik explained that Klinkhamer and Moxley are Healthy Lombard partners, and met at last year's February Fitness Fair event held at Yorktown Center. She said that Moxley, who teaches at College of DuPage and DePaul University, reached out to Klinkhamer, executive director and co-founder of ProActive Kids, to get help for a research project her nursing students were conducting.

Moxley, an instructor in the nursing programs at College of DuPage and DePaul University, related how she met Wojcik when the Healthy Lombard founder came to the Glen Ellyn school.

With a background in exercise physiology, and an interest in disease prevention, the nursing instructor said it was an easy decision to become a Healthy Lombard partner, and now, a board member.

She also had her COD students write a blog for the Healthy Lombard website.

At DePaul, Moxley continued, her advisees were working on research related to childhood obesity, so she turned to Klinkhamer for data they could analyze. That led to Klinkhamer and Moxley teaming up on the students' behalf to present the research findings at a meeting of the 15-year-old Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children, or CLOCC, which was held in Chicago on Dec. 7.

According to information provided by Wojcik in a news release, the students analyzed data about 884 young people from ages 8-14 in Chicago, obtained from ProActive Kids sites between 2010-17.

The data, she noted, showed that there had been improvements in body mass index (BMI), weight, body fat and fat mass in several counties; the most significant decreases in fat mass and overall body weight being



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAY WOJCIC *Lombardian-Villa Park Review*

Nicki Klinkhamer and Dr. Elizabeth Moxley (left to right) share with Healthy Lombard founder Jay Wojcik a desire to bring down childhood obesity rates. The women recently teamed up at a meeting of the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children, or CLOCC, to present findings from research done by some of Moxley's DePaul University nursing students. Moxley, who is also an instructor in the nursing program at College of DuPage, is a partner of Healthy Lombard, and so is ProActive Kids, of which Klinkhamer is a co-founder and executive director.

in DuPage and Cook counties.

The DuPage County Health Department is a Healthy Lombard Partner, both of which get childhood obesity statistics from FORWARD (www.dupagehealth.org), a coalition working to reverse the rates of childhood obesity in DuPage County.

A thumbnail sketch of FORWARD's findings shows that obesity among DuPage County public school students (kindergarten, sixth and ninth grades) has declined from 15.7 percent during the 2011-12 school year to 14.4 percent for 2015-16.

Yet, one in seven DuPage County students was found to be obese; 16.1 percent of males and 12.7 percent of females, according to the health department website. More than 40 percent of the obese children had elevated blood pressure.

Klinkhamer described how her husband, Anthony Burke, had weight issues as a child and that led to starting ProActive Kids in 2009. The non-profit became a Healthy Lombard partner in 2010.

She said that over 1,000 chil-

dren have graduated from the free program—sponsored by area hospitals—which is different from obesity prevention programs in that the children who participate are already overweight, thereby making it an intervention program.

Klinkhamer said the children participate for eight weeks, three days a week, in fitness activities, nutrition education and mental health coaching.

And, she emphasized, "The parents are actively involved."

"The parents have to be the health coach at home to make the change," Klinkhamer added.

The Healthy Lombard founder said that since forming her non-profit in 2009, she is seeing some improvement in childhood obesity rates, adding with a chuckle, "If I didn't, I think I'd be calling it quits."

In fact, her whole reason for launching the program has to do with having been a first grade teacher, then later, being a spokesperson for Lombard Elementary School District 44, where she began to observe an increasing number of obese children than when she was in the classroom.

"That's the part that struck a chord with me," she continued. "They're [children] just not as healthy as they used to be."

Wojcik and her husband, Ken, were involved with Kiwanis, where she saw an opportunity to revamp an idea for forming a coalition of partners to combat childhood obesity, since Kiwanis' focus is on children.

She and Mueller brainstormed, the founder outlined, noting, "He wanted to do something to improve the health of the community."

"The core grew out of Kiwanis," Wojcik recalled, whose members included business persons, schools, the park district, banks, etc., where she hoped to gain partners, advice or support for Healthy Lombard.

Healthy Lombard has grown to include around 46 partners, she said, and has added events such as the February Fitness Fair that includes the chance to become a Health Hero (improving one's health in some way), Flat Apple summer activity program, Apple Crunch Day and the GYM Bags program in the elementary schools, where children in second grade can take home fitness items for a weekend.

"I thought we'd be a little local Lombard thing," the found-

er quipped, but emphasized that Healthy Lombard grew out of a desire to prevent childhood obesity into a program that also focuses on the adults who care for or mentor these children.

"They're the role models," she said, agreeing with Klinkhamer that the adults are an integral part of helping children maintain good health, weight and an active lifestyle.

"We've been supportive of each other's mission," Klinkhamer commented, saying she is glad that Healthy Lombard "was able to make a connection" between her and Moxley, leading to their poster presentation at the CLOCC event, where Klinkhamer is a member.

"Jay's whole mission is improving health," Moxley said, which, she added, "is so key these days."

"I'm proud of both of them," said Wojcik, emphasizing that while the women didn't represent Healthy Lombard, their presence was another way to reach out and provide information on the issue of increased childhood obesity.

Wojcik said she is looking ahead to revamping Healthy Lombard into what she called "2.0," by surveying partners to "gauge the fit" between them and Healthy Lombard, and how the non-profit can be "a support as opposed to another 'thing' out there."

No matter what she may have in store for Healthy Lombard, Wojcik's bottom line is reducing the childhood obesity rate even further, because, as she put it, the children "are our future leaders."

For more information about Healthy Lombard, visit www.healthylombard.com.

For more information about ProActive Kids, which will be starting a spring session in Lombard (at a location to be determined), and to watch a video of how the program works, visit www.proactivekids.org.



STEVE SPODEN PHOTO *Lombardian/Villa Park Review*

New Early Childhood Center named after veteran board member

Lombard Elementary School District 44 Early Childhood Center's students and their families had a chance to visit with Santa and get a sneak peek of the center's new home on Saturday, Dec. 16. The center will also have a new name, The John Schroder Early Childhood Center, in honor of long-time District 44 board member John Schroder. The center had been located in four classrooms at Butterfield School. The center's new 34,000-square-foot home, located at 1519 S. Grace St., was the former home of Highland Hills School. The building, which is being renovated, includes a new gym and multipurpose room, along with renovated classrooms to meet the needs of the students. The new center will officially open Jan. 10. Pictured with Santa, and a snowman who greeted the children, are Schroder (seated, left), along with board member Gayle Kankovsky (seated, right), center Principal Catherine Angelos (standing, third from left), staff members and a few of the children who visited Santa.

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