

New group promotes healthy lifestyles

By Deborah Kohen
Sentinel-Voice

Outreach agencies and black churches have teamed to form a new coalition its members tout as a way to address health problems in the African-American community.

Community Partners for Better Health wants "to enable and empower African Americans to take personal responsibility for their own health in order to control disease and promote optimal health," according to the group's mission statement.

And, according to its literature, community agencies tabbed churches as partners they "are proven avenues to reach African-Americans," and "members of the clergy are trusted leaders and reliable sources of information."

The Rev. Marion Bennett, pastor of Zion United Methodist Church, thinks it's natural for churches to address health issues. "The church should be involved in people living a better life on this planet, not only morally but also physically," he said. "People need to take care of the body God has given them so they can be of service. If your battery is low, you can't charge someone else's."

A proponent of healthy living, Bennett said African-Americans need to change their diets as their lifestyles change.

"We still have the slave diet, full of starches and grease," he said, "but we don't do so much manual labor any more. Without proper exercise, that diet leads to illness. A lot of health problems are self-induced."

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REV. MARION BENNETT
eat of the fruit in the Garden," he continued, adding that fried foods are fine in moderation.

Dorothy Johnson groused about African-American's lack of physical activity.

"We're lazy," said Johnson of the National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer, a member of the coalition. "We lay on the couch too much. We eat too many potato chips and fried foods. We need to get up off the couch and get the body in shape."

Johnson is worried African-Americans aren't getting the messages that "whites are bombarded with." She complained that radio stations ignore press releases aimed at African-Americans — the American Cancer Society, she said, has sent press releases, but none have been broadcast.

Joyce Woodson, area nutrition specialist for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Health



REV. WILLIE DAVIS

and Nutrition Program, initiated the alliance of Community Partners. Citing research, she said one third of all heart disease and cancer is related to food choices and food preparation habits.

A registered dietician, she was asked to assess statewide health needs in 1993 and concluded there was an urgent need to educate people on heart disease, the nation's No. 1 killer.

Using the statistics, Woodson did surveys in seven Black churches, then called in representatives from each, plus a few health agencies, to look at the results.

She is urging local clergy to use the bully pulpit to push healthy living and to incorporate health issues in church programming. Through church backing and other publicity efforts, including a



Sentinel-Voice file photo

Prevention is worth an ounce of cure, medical nurses perform regular blood pressure test and checkups during free health screenings. See related stories on page 7.

monthly call-in talk show on KCEP FM 88.1 hosted by Larry Gamell, director of the Community Health Centers, Woodson hopes to raise awareness about living healthy and get more citizens to participate in events and programs.

"Hypertension (high blood pressure) is extremely high in the African-American community, and if left untreated, it can lead to heart disease and stroke," Woodson said, adding that "minority populations have a high incidence of all chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, hypertension, cancer and diabetes."

A spokesperson from the American Heart Association's North Las Vegas Division says that African-Americans have

a very high rate of heart disease and stroke, and that education about diet and exercise is the answer to this problem. "You don't have to join a gym and exercise every day" to improve your health, she said. "Walking for 30 minutes 3-to-4 times a week will make the difference, especially if you lower your intake of fat and salt."

Diabetes, like hypertension, can lead to other chronic illnesses, according to Debbie Devald of the American Diabetes Association. Diabetes is sometimes called "the silent killer" because often people don't know they have it until they've developed one of the disease's life-threatening complications: blindness, kidney disease, amputations, heart disease and stroke.

Devald said 2.6 million

African-Americans have diabetes and that Blacks are 1.4 to 2.3 times more likely to get the disease than whites. "The numbers are astonishing," she said, "and that's why we're trying to identify the at-risk groups."

According to the American Diabetes Association, these are the high risk categories: age range 45-64, overweight, physically inactive, having a family history of diabetes, and being a woman who had "gestational" diabetes (during pregnancy) or had a baby who weighed nine or more pounds at birth. The association urges people who fit any of those categories to take a self-scored diabetes risk test to see if they should consult a doctor.

Willie Davis, pastor of
(See Health, Page 16)

HUD thinks well of LVHA, gives it exceptional score

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Las Vegas Housing Authority graded out nearly perfect in its annual review by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HUD, which conducts yearly reviews of housing authorities nationwide, gave the LVHA a 97.75 percent mark.

"We are very pleased with our score," said Otto Merida, chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

"We work hard to offer affordable and quality housing to our residents. It is our goal to provide safe, decent and sanitary housing to low-income families and senior citizens."

The LVHA, which serves more than 12,000 residents, has seen its scores rise significantly over the last few years; in 1994, the housing authority managed only 63.7 percent.

"We strive to offer not only quality housing but also innovative programs and assistance geared to help our residents," said Betty Turner, the housing authority's deputy executive director.

"We encourage our residents to become self-reliant and contribute back to our city."

Executive Director Frederick Brown is proud of the results but said the housing authority won't rest on its laurels.

"We are constantly working to improve our facilities and will continue to do our best," he said.

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