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## **The Greater Joliet Area YMCA is Working to Improve the Health of Residents Living in Will County**

Over the past several decades, our nation has fallen into a rut of unhealthy lifestyles. The lack of physical activity coupled with unhealthy eating has led to a huge spike in obesity rates, putting individuals at risk of deadly chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure and diabetes. In the past year alone, obesity rates have skyrocketed in 16 states and exceed 30 percent in 12 states, according to *F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future 2011*, a just-released report from the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The obesity rate among Illinois adults is 15 percent greater today than two decades ago, according to the report.

Obesity is one of our nation's biggest health problems and has long been associated with contributing to chronic diseases and other severe health problems. This health crisis sheds light on the need to reverse the epidemic and provide children and adults with resources and support to help get them on a path to healthier living. For the past four years, helping those who live and work in Will County adopt healthier lifestyles and increase their well-being has been a main point of emphasis for the Greater Joliet Area YMCA. Through the Y's involvement in the Joliet Partners for Healthy Families (JPHF) program, Will County residents are learning to live healthier.

Designed to enhance the quality of life for residents of all ages, abilities and ethnic backgrounds, the Joliet Partners for Healthy Families is a collaborative effort among nearly a dozen community organizations throughout Will County. Since its inception in 2007, the JPHF has worked to encourage families to engage in fun, active lifestyles and embrace well-balanced diets. As part of this family-focused initiative, students in Joliet Public School District 86 benefit from The Healthy Kids Club, an afterschool program that features fun fitness, swimming lessons and nutrition and nature education. Local families also benefit from a variety of health fairs and workshops, further promoting the importance of good nutrition and exercise for the entire family.

"The Greater Joliet Area YMCA believes that the solution to solving the nation's lifestyle health crisis begins with prevention on the local level," says Tom Sutter, CEO, Greater Joliet Area YMCA. "With the Y having such a large presence in our community, we are able to tailor our programs to meet the specific needs of Joliet area residents and make living healthy an easier choice."

As a leading nonprofit committed to strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, the Greater Joliet Area YMCA believes obesity and chronic diseases can be addressed effectively on a local level with a commitment to programs and initiatives that give people the support they need to

sustain healthier lifestyles. In fact, Ys nationwide are working to ensure that all of the places where people live, work, learn and play provide opportunities for healthy living.

“As governments at all levels face difficult budget decisions, one way to lessen the costs that are crippling our health care system is by reducing obesity and preventing chronic diseases,” added Sutter. “We all have a role to play, and it is critical we encourage Congress to invest in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Healthy Communities Program, which empowers community leaders, like the Y, to build environments in support of healthy eating and physical activity in an effort to keep chronic diseases and obesity at bay.”

To learn more about the Greater Joliet Area YMCA’s healthy living programs, please contact Health and Wellness Director Lisa Behounek at (815) 267-8600, ext. 206 or via e-mail at [lbehounek@jolietyymca.org](mailto:lbehounek@jolietyymca.org).

For more information about the programs and services available through the Greater Joliet Area YMCA, please visit [www.jolietyymca.org](http://www.jolietyymca.org).

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