

August 13, 2008 - Murtha praises local YMCA's proposed diabetes program

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By Jeff Pikulsky

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CARROLL TOWNSHIP - U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha came to the Mid-Mon Valley on Tuesday to endorse the Mon Valley YMCA's campaign to fight diabetes one member at a time.

YMCA officials sponsored a luncheon that served as the kickoff for a \$100,000 fund-raising campaign that will help provide nutritional fitness programs to members ages 8 and older who have diabetes.

Murtha, the keynote speaker at the event, has been a strong advocate for diabetes research and treatment programs since 2003, when he found out through the U.S. Air Force surgeon general that 144,000 Air Force personnel and members of their families have diabetes.

Since then, the Johnstown Democrat has helped provide \$120 million in federal funds to military programs associated with diabetes research and treatment.

Murtha said he was pleased to see a community-based diabetes program launching in this area.

He reminded more than 100 residents and community leaders gathered at the YMCA that more than 23 million Americans have diabetes.

"I found out some years ago that we have an epidemic in Western Pennsylvania ... it's either people don't feel safe to be outside, or they are watching television or they use the computer," Murtha said. "Physical activity is the key to reducing diabetes. If you reduce your body weight by 7 percent, you reduce your chance of getting diabetes by 50 percent."

Murtha said helping the YMCA promote its program is part of his ongoing campaign.

"Because we have such an epidemic, we are working with a number of hospitals in Western Pennsylvania," Murtha said. "It's a serious disability and all of us have to work together trying to find ways to eradicate what I consider one of the most dangerous diseases in the United States."

The Mon Valley YMCA serves 4,500 regional residents.

Murtha said, based on his experience with the Mon Valley YMCA in the past, he is confident that the organization's leadership will once again make a notable impact on the community.

"This is one of the finest Y's I've ever been to," he said. "The Y here has programs other people would die for."

Murtha noted the importance of early intervention and awareness in fighting the disease.

"These young kids are a lot less obese than kids I've seen in other places," Murtha said.

YMCA wellness director Bill Holzapfel will coordinate the diabetes program with YMCA staff members.

Holzapfel said he will design fitness and nutrition programs based on each participant's specific needs.

Participants will pay a minimal fee to enroll in the program.

Those who cannot afford the fee can apply for financial assistance through the YMCA.

YMCA executive director Ken Wiltz said the YMCA will work with local school districts and health care providers to institute "Ready to be Fit."

He said YMCA staff members targeted diabetes after learning that several of the members are coping with the disease.

"One of the most satisfying feelings is knowing that for the past 40 years, the YMCA has been making a difference in the growth of our community," Wiltz said. "Building strong kids, strong families and strong communities has been a cornerstone in the Mon Valley YMCA's commitment in helping make our Mid-Mon Valley a better place to live, work, and raise a family."

"We must realize that there is a very large portion of our population that we aren't reaching. We must face that diabetes and obesity have reached nationwide, epidemic proportions. Addressing diabetes and obesity remains a national public health priority."

Chris Matthews, the host of the MSNBC talk show, "Hardball with Chris Matthews," was supposed to speak at Tuesday's event.

Wiltz said Matthews, a diabetic, could not attend because he was suffering from pneumonia.

For more information about the YMCA's diabetes program or to make a donation, call (724) 483-8077.