



Desoto, Marshall and Tate counties, MS

▲ Community Example from Chapter 1 of "Lessons for Leaders:"
Lessons in Community Capacity Building

Community Background

DeSoto, Marshall and Tate counties are located in the Delta region of northwestern Mississippi, a state with high rates of childhood and adult obesity. Higher rates of obesity persist in these three counties as well. To address this, the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi led the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* (HKHC) partnership to expand leadership capacity efforts already underway in eight counties, including Marshall and Tate. Partnerships in each county included residents, mayors, health officials, educators, churches, businesses and nonprofit organizations, with the goal of increasing access to healthy foods and opportunities to be physically active.

Community Action

Developing leadership capacity required timely, customized technical assistance and training. Residents, community leaders and elected officials actively engaged through seminars, environmental audits, charrettes and the creation of GIS maps. To facilitate healthy planning, the HKHC partnership conducted seminars for elected officials focused on active living. The partnership also established faith-based wellness networks for local congregations, and held physical activity and training workshops for preschool and day-care centers.

Partners emerged as leaders, benefitting from good learning networks and shared resources. These included three annual health summits focused on policy and environmental changes needed to build healthier communities. Continuing Education Units were available at each summit. A Healthier Communities Toolkit was

developed and given to each local government. HKHC also supported and engaged community members through their participation in local and regional health councils and the Mississippi Food Policy Council.

Dr. Michael Minor, an HKHC partner, became nationally recognized for healthy faith-based initiatives in DeSoto County. He was invited to the White House, along with the City of Hernando's mayor, Chip Johnson, to assist the First Lady in launching her *Let's Move!* initiative. In addition, considerable leadership has emerged in each of the three counties, resulting in significant environmental and policy changes.

For example, Phil Malone, the mayor of Byhalia in Tate County, and a supporter of HKHC from its inception, became a champion for HKHC, ensuring that either he or a community member attended every local training. His city had just one small park and a walking trail. Mayor Malone established "Walks with the Mayor" events, leading to residents, asking for (and receiving) an expanded walking trail and new playground equipment in their park. He also fought for the adoption of a Complete Streets policy and sidewalk requirements.

In fact, Complete Streets resolutions and ordinances now exist in each of the three counties. Other victories include new design standards for sidewalks in Marshall County; new walking trails in Tate County with funds raised by community members; new bike lanes in DeSoto County; helmet policies for youth under 18 in Tate and DeSoto counties; and new sidewalks in DeSoto County, connecting the east and west sides of Hernando. Plans are in place to sustain these and other efforts.