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NEWS RELEASE

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Community Walking Project Enters Final Phase *"Team Members Log Twenty-One Million Steps"*

In the ten weeks since they began, the ninety-seven participants taking part in the *"A Better Me: Fit, Healthy and Happy"* fitness program sponsored by the Oneida County Health Department have cumulatively walked the equivalent of 39-hundred miles while learning about the benefits of proper nutrition and the prevention of diabetes and obesity, according to Dr. Gayle Jones, Oneida County Director of Health.

"The program was designed to reduce health disparities among underserved women and girls, counseling them on nutrition and physical activity while recording their steps over a ninety day period," Jones said. *She added, "The participants, each of whom wears a pedometer, comprise eight teams who submit the number of steps they walk each week."*

Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr. acknowledged the personal commitment on the part of those participating in the program.

"I commend those who have taken the first 'steps' to a healthier lifestyle. Each serves as a positive example and an inspiration to their co-workers and family members who need to overcome complacency that often leads to poor eating habits, inactivity and obesity that so many people in our culture fall victim to," Picente said.

In addition to the physical component of the program, team members have been provided weekly fact sheets on topics such as the benefits of drinking water, how to read nutrition labels, the effects of consuming sugary beverages and combating diabetes and obesity through proper eating habits and physical exercise. Those taking part were asked to complete an assessment by answering questions relating to eating habits, activity levels and weight at the beginning of the program. The information will be compared to the results of the post-assessments participants are now in the process of completing.

Organizations involved in the program include the Utica Community Health Center, Faxton-St. Luke's OB Care Center, Yorkville Seniors, Cornell Cooperative Extension, For the Good, Inc., BOCES Utica Access Site and the Johnson Park Center which is represented by two teams.

The *"A Better Me: Fit, Healthy and Happy"* program is funded through a \$2500 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services Regional Office on Women's Health and was awarded to the Oneida County Health Department earlier this year. The monies from the grant fund educational programs and prizes to be awarded to the top teams participating in the program.

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