

# Healthy Family FunFest in Southington draws over 4,000

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SOUTHINGTON - Good, healthy fun took place in the Aqua Turf Club Sunday.

Hartford HealthCare teamed up with the Southington-Cheshire YMCA and the Main Street Community Foundation for the annual Healthy Family FunFest, which had over 4,000 visitors in its 10th year.

While the Southington Police Department checked car seats for safety outside, adults received health screenings and kids climbed through an obstacle course indoors. As they arrived, people donated canned food items to Southington Bread for Life.

Nearly everyone who attended the free event couldn't resist a journey through the Mega Heart, a 21-foot inflatable model of the body's life-pumping organ. Justin Reiswerg guided groups through the 12-ft. high tunnel, pointing out ventricles, arteries and blood vessels and revealing the role each plays.

"We make sure before they leave kids learn that healthy eating and exercise keep their hearts healthy," Reiswerg said. "Taking care of your heart is a lifelong event. A lot of people don't realize that until it's too late."

More than 100 exhibitors presented health, nutrition and fitness information in demonstrations and pamphlets.

"We're bringing health and wellness to families all in one spot today," HHC Director of Planning and Communication Erika Stinson explained. "It's a perfect day for parents to do something fun with their kids while getting that education at the same time."

The HHC Pharmacy Department had a booth on the safety of different medications. "Is it poison or candy?" read a poster comparing popular sweets to potentially dangerous prescriptions. Registered Nurse Joanne Struble from the Heart & Vascular Institute promoted the Sept. 16 event 'Pinot and Prevention' featuring a cardiologist and a comedian.

Southington YMCA staff ran a kids' area and fitness activities for all ages.

"A lot of families and many in the senior community are really taking advantage of the day," YMCA Chief Executive Director Mark Pooler said. "It's about getting people in the communities we serve to be the healthiest they can be."

Center for Healthy Aging Family Engagement Coordinator Patty O'Brian and Resource Coordinator Jennifer McCaughey greeted visitors to the health screenings section, where over 100 cholesterol tests were



Photo by Erica Drzewiecki | Staff Kids perform "hands-only" CPR on mannequins during the Healthy Family FunFest at the Aqua Turf Sunday.

administered. They also sat down with families to address individual concerns.

“We’ve had a lot of questions from people who want to keep their loved ones at home and out of a nursing home as long as they can,” O’Brian pointed out.

Staff also conducted dementia screens to detect early signs of the condition in those worried about their memory.

“If we don’t have the answer they’re seeking we connect them with the right resource to find the answer,” McCaughey said.

By far the most frequented booth was a hands-free CPR exhibit, where kids learned how to perform the life-saving technique without the mouth-to-mouth component. As they did chest compressions on mannequins, each child’s progress was displayed on a screen above.

“This is a great tool,” HHC Technologist Geoffrey Gelinas said. “The most important part of CPR is the chest compressions. They keep the blood circulating.”

He stood with lifelike sim-canine “Axel” - introduced by the Center for Education, Simulation & Innovation (CESI) just last week. One of only 31 sim-dogs in the country, Axel will train Connecticut State Police to tend to injured K-9 officers when the need arises.

“This is the only one being used in a healthcare setting; the others are all currently for military use,” Gelinas said.

Visitors enjoyed the rare chance to meet Axel, designed to teach those who work with service animals how to set broken bones, perform a tracheotomy, respond to gunshot wounds and tend to other injuries.

“This is a great event to spread awareness about health-related topics,” Meriden resident Robert Rodriguez said as he had his blood-glucose checked.

His sons Lucas, 10, and Jacob, 8, were fascinated by Axel. The family were FunFest first-timers.

“I like everything here,” Lucas said.

Cheshire resident Allyson Belen and her daughter Julia, 5, sat down in the YMCA’s Kids Area to color a picture.

“We came last year too,” Belen said. “They always put on a good show.”

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