

PRESS RELEASE

Medical Wellness Center Leads Curriculum Design for University of Miami - Dade County Summer Camp Partnership

Campers Learn about Health and Fitness

In conjunction with Miami-Dade Parks, University of Miami medical students are teaching summer campers about nutrition, stress management and tobacco prevention.

Know the difference between five pounds of fat and five pounds of muscle?

By summer's end, hundreds of kids in Miami-Dade will learn this and other answers through an innovative program teaming University of Miami medical students with summer campers at county parks. "Keeping healthy is something you have to do," Donna Shalala, president of the University of Miami, told 200 campers Monday at a pep rally to kick-off the program. "Your parents can't do it for you."

Through the partnership, UM medical students will hold health fairs in July and August at summer camps at five Miami-Dade parks: Country Village, Goulds, Gwen Cherry, Tamiami and Tropical Estates. These sites have the facilities and location to act as hubs so campers throughout the county park system can attend the fairs, said Jack Kardys, director of Miami-Dade Parks.

BMI SCREENINGS

Children will learn about fitness and nutrition, safety, stress management and tobacco prevention. They will receive Body Mass Index (BMI) screenings and, if necessary, medical referrals to pediatricians and follow-ups.

"By intervening early, we have a chance to start good habits," said Dr. Pascal Goldschmidt, dean of the UM Miller School of Medicine.

The summer camps -- called Fit to Play, Fun for Life -- already focus on health, Kardys said. All children work toward completing a fitness challenge, including push-ups, sit-ups, a sprint and a quarter-mile run, all while their progress is tracked. Now in their fourth year, the summer camps show the children improve between 10 and 30 percent in each category, Kardys said. The new partnership will put an even sharper focus on physical well-being. UM student-athletes will join in as role models.

At the pep rally, former Miami Hurricanes linebacker and two-time NFL Super Bowl Champ Darrin Smith encouraged the kids to stay fit to achieve their dreams.

ENCOURAGEMENT

"Why I'm able to wear these rings is because of what I did when I was young," Smith said, flashing one of his Super Bowl rings.

He shared his story with the crowd: how as a 7-year-old he played at Gwen Cherry Park; how he snuck out to play football by himself with a bundle of socks as a ball; how he day-dreamed he was both the quarterback and linebacker in the same game.

"Whatever you want to do in life, you have to be in shape," Smith said. "To be able to do all you want to do, it starts right now."

Ten-year-old Brittany Cooper is already on her way to her dream. "I want to be a professional dancer," she said, showing off her moves with the Gwen Cherry dance team.

Also at the kick-off, the Parks Foundation donated \$25,000 for scholarships and challenged the community to match it, with the goal of sending 100 more children to camp.