

For Immediate Release

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Hastings Area Businesses Introduce Award-Level Healthy Vending Machines

[Hastings, Neb. – July 28, 2017] – When you think of vending machines, you don't typically think of healthy snacks or healthy drinks. Hastings YMCA, Nebraska Cold Storage and Centennial Plastics in partnership with South Health District Health Department are changing the expectation with the introduction of award-level healthy vending machines for visitors and employees.

Over the past year, South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) and the three Hastings businesses have worked closely with First Choice Vending to provide healthier options for their onsite snack machines and beverage machines. New signage has been installed to prompt visitors and employees to choose a healthy option.

Vending machine customers are encouraged to "Choose Healthy Here" by selecting options with less fat, less sugar, less sodium, fewer calories and more nutritional value.

According to Brooke Wolfe, SHDHD's Prevention Connection project lead, to be considered an award level vending machine, machines must contain a minimum of 30% healthy food items or 55% healthy beverage items.

"Visitors and employees can identify these machines by looking for 'Choose Healthy Here' signs and green or yellow "pushers", Wolfe explained. "Vending customers are especially encouraged to look for food items providing a serving of fruits, vegetables, or whole grains and, in beverage machines, look for water, unsweetened tea, low calorie flavored waters or 100% juice."

Hastings YMCA Wellness Director Erika Knot said that this initiative is aligned with the Y's mission. "Our staff strategically works on programs and policies to help reach our mission of building our community through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility," said Knot.

"Healthy vending is one avenue SHDHD has provided for us to continue to grow in these areas," Knot said. "We strive to focus on all aspects of health and the food people consume plays

majors roles in their health. We are excited to be able to help educate our members and staff, as well as provide them with healthier options.”

Following the new vending products taste testing event sponsored by First Choice Vending, Centennial Plastics receptionist Sarah Petr said that employees responded positively and had great feedback. They are requesting “different items in the machines which include cheese, yogurt, frozen yogurt and those veggie chips which we sampled,” she said.

According to Wolfe, “the Hastings YMCA, Nebraska Cold Storage and Centennial Plastics have set a positive standard for vending machines at worksites and community venues in the South Heartland health district.”

South Heartland health director Michele Bever said the funding for this chronic disease prevention project comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and was provided by a grant to SHDHD through the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

“We encourage other employers in the South Heartland area to join us for year 4 of the project and consider instituting similar vending or other policy changes that provide a supportive and healthy environment for their employees,” Bever said.

To learn more about healthy vending initiatives and opportunities for other worksites in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, contact South Heartland District Health Department by calling (402) 462-6211 or toll free at 1-877-238-7595 or contact by e-mail: mail@shdhd.org.

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