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MEDIA RELEASE - August 16, 2010

Chamber and Co-op partner for a healthy community

The Markdale Chamber of Commerce and the new Highlands Community Co-operative have partnered with several other local organizations in a successful bid for a Healthy Communities Fund grant.

The \$44,246 grant from the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion will support a variety of recreational and community health initiatives including an Active Living For All (ALFA) program, which will be run out of the co-op's Flesherton fitness facility.

Formerly the Delphi, the Highlands Community Co-operative began at the beginning of June. It has a founding board of directors in place, is running the fitness facility and applying and receiving grant funds from a variety of sources. It is also offering debentures for members of the cooperative.

This new Healthy Communities Fund grant was sponsored by the Markdale Chamber, which took the lead position on the grant application. The Chamber has a successful history of grant applications and completion. The Chamber board is administering the grant, which is facilitated by Chamber project coordinator Kate Russell.

"What an excellent way to get community organizations together," said Russell of the grant, which sees the Chamber and co-op partnering with South East Grey Support Services (SEGSS), Grey Bruce Dragon Boat Club, Grey Bruce Public Health Unit, South East Grey Museum and the Markdale Agricultural Society. "The more we work together, the stronger our community will be."

The grant provides funds for the ALFA program, which will see at least 45 SEGSS clients matched with personal trainers to improve their physical fitness by participating in recreational activity at the HCC gym and pool. Funding will also provide for youth training on Dragon Boats as well as some paddles, gloves and life jackets for participants. SEGSS clients and youth will be given the opportunity to volunteer at the museum and the Good Food Box, sponsored by the public health unit and coordinated locally by the Markdale Agricultural Society, will be expanded to Flesherton in September.

"All the partners are providing in-kind support of the project," explained Highlands Community Co-operative General Manager Carol Gott. "We now have the community-based formula to apply for grants to support local residents to pursue a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle."

During the course of the project supported by the grant, the HCC will track the fitness and participation levels of those in the programs to report back on the success of the project. It is expected more people will become involved in fitness and recreation, more young people will become interested in paddling and there will be good food in more local refrigerators.

The grant is good until the end of March 2011, but the Chamber and the HCC plan to apply for a second year of funding to ensure the stability of the projects and its long term sustainability.

"We are just starting to get a hold on all the possibilities with the co-operative," said Russell, who sits on the board of the HCC and is chair of its resources committee. "The more community partners and individuals we can get involved, the better. Membership in the co-op is a great way to show your support of the community initiatives we are pursuing."

Membership in the co-op is \$10 annually and gets individuals discounts on fitness memberships, pool memberships and programming at the Flesherton fitness facility. There is currently a debenture offering to boost the financial status of the HCC. To learn more call 519 924-0707, email hello.hcc@gmail.com or go to www.thehcc.ca.