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Quality Institute Announces Mayors Wellness Campaign New Jersey “Healthy Town” Winners for 2020

PRINCETON, New Jersey — Addressing food insecurity. Helping residents stay physically and mentally active. Supporting COVID-19 testing clinics.

The 2020 Mayors Wellness Campaign (MWC) “New Jersey Healthy Town” winners are being recognized for their innovative responses to local needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eight communities participating in the MWC, a program of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute, in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, were named *2020 Healthy Towns*. Another nine towns were designated as *2020 Healthy Towns to Watch*, and five were designated as *2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming*.

Each year, communities participating in the MWC complete a comprehensive Healthy Town Application outlining the research they’ve done to identify their community health needs and explaining how they have organized their local MWC committee. The application also highlights the actions they’ve taken to make their communities healthier places to live, work, and play.

Here’s a listing of the winners and the efforts that helped them receive recognition from the MWC.

City of Asbury Park, 2020 Healthy Town

Asbury Park received a Healthy Town to Watch designation in 2019 and has worked hard to become a 2020 Healthy Town, overcoming the barriers created by the pandemic. Programs include:

- Support for local food pantries to help distribute food to those in need.
- Ryde4Life provides free on-demand transportation through Lyft and Uber to doctor appointments and food shopping for seniors, individuals with disabilities, or those who do not drive. More than 1,424 rides were taken by city residents in 2020.

- COVID-19 testing. In partnership with the Monmouth County Health Department, testing clinics were provided for city and county residents.

“The designation of the City of Asbury Park as a Healthy Town represents a culmination of years of hard work by our Mayors Wellness Committee members, community organizations, health care partners and residents to promote a culture of health and active lifestyles for all of Asbury Park. We thank the Quality Institute for the honor and for recognizing all that our volunteers have done in the community,” said Mayor John Moor.

Evesham Township, 2020 Healthy Town

Evesham Township was awarded a 2019 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming designation and has focused on improvements to achieve this year's Healthy Town designation. In response to the many challenges of 2020, Evesham leveraged partnerships to ensure important programs and resources were available to residents. Efforts included:

- Partnership with the Quality Institute and Cooper University Health Care to provide a "Coping with Stress During the Pandemic" to support mental health in the community.
- The formation of the Human Rights Advisory Council as a way to bolster the increasing number of Americans across the nation joining the fight against inequality and injustice. This volunteer group of residents and public officials, appointed by the Mayor, communicates with the township's governing body on how the Township can better educate and strengthen respect for the human rights of all citizens and explore the issues needed to keep a diverse community healthy and safe.

“It’s a true honor for Evesham Township to be named a 2020 Healthy Town through the Mayors Wellness Campaign and Quality Institute,” said Mayor Jackie Veasy. “One of my top priorities as Mayor is to provide residents of all abilities the opportunity to maintain great physical and mental health through use of our outstanding facilities and programs. I’m especially proud we earned the Healthy Town distinction for our work during 2020, in which we were able to help our residents maintain a well-balanced lifestyle during the COVID-19 pandemic, while also enacting the precautions necessary to keep all residents healthy and safe.”

Montclair, 2020 Healthy Town

Montclair received a Healthy Town designation for the third year in a row. The township's health and human services department not only responded to the needs that emerged from the pandemic, but also continued health and wellness programming and education throughout the year. Programs included:

- Increased access to remote programming for older adults.
- Food distribution for residents over 60 so that they were able to stay safely in their homes.
- Montclair's Community Farms Coalition, which helped to keep residents active and address food insecurity.

“Maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle is always important, but now especially. It’s critical that our community members have access to healthful foods, nutrition information, and a variety of options for sports and other exercise activities. There have been challenges along the way, but the Township, with the help of our community partners, has been able to offer a variety of activities for people of all ages, both in the physical and virtual spheres. The well-being of our residents is of critical importance and we are proud to have met the challenges to be once again honored with the Quality Institute’s recognition of Montclair as a Mayors Wellness Campaign Healthy Town,” said Mayor Sean Spiller.

Paterson, 2020 Healthy Town

Paterson was awarded a 2019 Healthy Town to Watch designation and has continued its efforts throughout the pandemic to achieve a Healthy Town designation. Mayor Sayegh is a true champion for the program, which had Paterson First Lady Farhanna Sayegh host women's workouts in their own backyard. Prior to the program's shift to COVID-19 response, a kickoff event, “Mayor’s Walk To The Great Falls,” was held in January. The event increased awareness and understanding of the MWC overall, and encouraged walking outside and as a group in Paterson. The program engaged all Paterson residents, including students from nearby schools, where the Mayor led a group walk from City Hall down to the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park. This event yielded over 200 participants and was also on Facebook Live so that those unable to participate could still witness the event.

“Although we would have never anticipated a pandemic, we quickly repurposed our wellness campaign to keep our residents safe during this crisis,” said Mayor Andre Sayegh. “Our focus was on the mental and physical health of Patersonians and how the Mayors Wellness Campaign could help conquer COVID-19. We are honored that our efforts have been recognized by the Quality Institute and we have received the Healthy Town designation.”

Plainfield, 2020 Healthy Town

This will be the City of Plainfield's third year receiving the Healthy Town designation. The program recognizes the importance of social determinants of health, especially throughout the pandemic. The city has emphasized the importance of access to health care and health education through the following programs:

- Nutrition counseling for city employees.
- Health screenings for residents including blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol, and lead screening.
- Community outreach to increase awareness of mental health issues and for COVID-19 vaccine roll out.

Scotch Plains, 2020 Healthy Town

This is Scotch Plain's third year receiving a Healthy Town designation. One of Scotch Plain's greatest strengths is its ability to leverage community partnerships to provide a variety of programs to residents. Partnership organizations include the Department of Parks and

Recreation, Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association, local private and public schools, local fitness and nutrition professionals, and the Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA. Because of these partnerships, the township was able to offer the following programs throughout the year:

- Sunrise Yoga Saturdays.
- Scotch Plains Farmers Market.
- Nutrition challenges.
- Community 5k races.

“It's an honor for Scotch Plains to once again be designated through the Quality Institute's Mayors Wellness Campaign Healthy Town,” said Mayor Josh Losardo. “I would like to recognize former Mayor Al Smith, who was a leader in this program and set forth a number of healthy initiatives. I look forward to building upon that fine work in collaboration with the Administration and the Township Council. We are committed to promoting healthy behaviors, with a strong focus on enhancing our public parks and expanding recreational opportunities, as well as hosting town-wide events that encourage interaction and further builds our community.”

Wildwood Crest, 2020 Healthy Town

Wildwood Crest has moved its way up through the Healthy Town designations to become a 2020 Healthy Town. The focus for programming in 2020 was on reducing stress and building healthy bodies and minds. Programs included live stream exercise classes, and videos and monthly wellness challenges through the town Facebook page. The wellness challenges encompassed all aspects of health including diet and nutrition, stress relief and meditation, exercise, hygiene and self-care and education. Participants earned points for engaging in wellness initiatives that supported a healthy overall lifestyle. These activities invariably led to posts and group online discussions.

“I would like to thank the Quality Institute for recognizing the Borough of Wildwood Crest as a New Jersey Healthy Town. Since starting our program in 2019, our Mayors Wellness Campaign has received overwhelming participation and support from our residents, municipal staff, vacationers, and partners. I extend a heartfelt thank you to our wellness committee and recreation staff for helping to carry out the mission of wellness throughout our community, especially during a pandemic. We are just getting started,” said Mayor Don Cabrera.

Woodbridge Township, 2020 Healthy Town

Woodbridge Township was a 2019 Healthy Town to Watch and has been dedicated to improving the health and wellness of its community throughout the pandemic, resulting in a Healthy Town designation for 2020, In addition to moving programs to a virtual platform, providing programs that focused on both mental and physical health, and keeping programs socially distanced when possible, Woodbridge shifted focus to food insecurity, a need emerging from the effects of the pandemic. New food collections were created and incorporated into already existing programs, which enabled the township to provide food for those in need.

"Health and wellness is a top priority in Woodbridge," said Mayor John McCormac. "2020 was a stressful year for many, so our Mayors Wellness Team helped put an emphasis on physical and mental wellness by continuing to offer a variety of programming to our community while following all safety protocols. We are honored to be designated one of New Jersey's Healthy Towns".

The following communities were designated as *2020 Healthy Towns to Watch*:

Bay Head, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

Bay Head responded to the need to shift programs to a virtual platform and was able to successfully continue programming throughout the pandemic. The town created a new website specifically for its health and wellness resources and information. In person events were adjusted to stay compliant with state regulations while still encouraging healthy behaviors.

"Bay Head is very proud to be designated again as a Mayors Wellness Campaign Healthy Town to Watch," said Mayor Bill Curtis. "We want to thank the Quality Institute for this recognition. We have been blessed with outstanding, enthusiastic leadership of our Mayors Wellness Committee since its inception and I want to thank Meryl Clement and her committee for their work this year. What makes me so very proud is that we have done all of our activities with volunteers. Our volunteers live in Bay Head, take pride in Bay Head, have a passion for wellness and are willing to try new programs that involve all residents and visitors, young (preschoolers and grade schoolers) through Octogenarians and beyond."

Borough of Freehold, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

The Borough of Freehold is a first-time designee. Despite the challenges of starting a program during the pandemic, the town was able to use its MWC to respond to the needs emerging as a result. A comprehensive initiative to address emerging food insecurity, "Freehold Food Safety Net," raised \$27,000 in less than a week. Through the program, Freehold was able to:

- Provide 3,200 meals to students and families over spring break, when no school-based meals were available.
- Offer senior and homebound resident food delivery. The food was delivered by volunteers and purchased from Freehold Borough restaurants.
- Provide meals served by volunteers for families at the Borough elementary and middle schools.
- Distribute more than 6,000 fresh produce boxes to residents on holidays and weekends, providing a series of 10 popup produce distributions for fresh produce to 1,500 residents.
- Offer a 10-week voucher program at the Farmers Market, serving more than 700 people and providing nearly \$37,000 in vouchers.

"My colleagues on the Borough Council and I wish to express our gratitude to the Quality Institute for naming Freehold Borough as a 2020 New Jersey Healthy Town to Watch. We are honored to have our efforts to create a great community recognized and we thank all of our

partners, volunteers, staff and citizens for their role in advancing our initiatives to make Freehold Borough a model community to live, work, play and visit. We're justifiably proud of our little town where we celebrate our diversity, respect and help each other, and work together to create a safe, healthy and progressive community where our children, our seniors, and our families can thrive and be happy" said Mayor Kevin Kane.

Denville, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

This is Denville's second year in a row receiving the Healthy Town to Watch designation. In 2020, the town focused on providing programming despite the pandemic. New outdoor spaces and virtual platforms were used to provide programs including:

- Music Theater programming which supported community participation and social wellness for youth and an opportunity to express themselves through art.
- Senior Yoga to encourage older adults to remain physically and socially active in a safe environment.
- Denville's Community Garden which encourages healthy eating while also providing a sense of community for residents.

"Thanks to our Recreation Director and Committee, despite the limitations caused by COVID-19, Denville was able to remain active and I am delighted that Denville has been named a Healthy Town to Watch by the Quality Institute," said Mayor Tom Andes.

Franklin Lakes, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

In response to the pandemic, Franklin Lakes launched its "At Home Activities and Challenges," which reached families, athletes, businesses, seniors, and employees. The program was designed to keep students active throughout the "Stay at Home" orders, but turned into something much larger, engaging the entire Franklin Lakes community. By partnering with the public library and the borough, the town was able to run contests, games, activities and challenges for people of all ages.

"Franklin Lakes is once again honored to be named a Health Town to Watch, by Quality Institute, especially during a year when the unprecedented pandemic had disrupted everyday norms and programming. Credit goes to innovative thinking and effective execution of alternate planning by our incredibly talented Community and Sports Directors who worked within Executive Orders and safety protocols to keep people active in both body and mind during a very difficult time," said Mayor Frank Bivona.

Hillsborough Township, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

Hillsborough Township was awarded a 2019 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming designation and has worked hard to achieve this year's Healthy Town to Watch designation. The town was able to continue programs throughout the pandemic, turning to social media and virtual platforms to advertise and hold its events. In addition to providing functional fitness classes, senior walks,

and a drive-through health fair for residents, Hillsborough continued its Employee Wellness programming to help staff stay active and healthy throughout the pandemic.

"On behalf of the Mayors Wellness Campaign in Hillsborough Township, we are honored to be recognized as a Healthy Town to Watch. Living an active and healthy lifestyle is important and we are looking forward to more initiatives through the program for 2021." Mayor Shawn Lipani.

Jefferson Township, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

Jefferson Township was awarded a 2019 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming designation and enhanced programming to achieve its 2020 Healthy Town to Watch designation. The township leveraged social media to ensure residents were informed about the latest COVID-19 updates, as well as MWC activities. Through partnerships with local health care systems, businesses, and community organizations, the following programs were offered:

- Conversation of Your Life (COYL) programming to educate residents about advance care planning.
- Mental health awareness and suicide prevention workshops.
- Summer outdoor yoga classes.

"We are ecstatic to influence our residents to make positive and healthy behavior changes through a variety of programs offered with the Mayors Wellness Campaign!" said Mayor Eric Wilsusen.

Jersey City, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

Jersey City has a long history of providing health and wellness programming to its residents. The city's focus on its diverse population and a variety of health issues results in tackling a wide range of health concerns in the community. In 2020, the COVID-19 response led to the collection and distribution of supplies including:

- 24,000 cloth masks.
- 250,000 face shields.
- 2,500 dated N95 masks that were updated by the "Sewing Angels" a group of volunteer high school students.

"The efforts we're making on the municipal level will have an immeasurable impact on the overall health of our community for years to come, which is why Jersey City is proud to be a leader in implementing innovative solutions and policies to help urban areas like ours overcome the systematic issues that have plagued underserved communities for far too long. This pandemic has disproportionately affected the more economically challenged areas and exacerbated societal issues, which is why we are committed to expanding our efforts, and we look forward to continued progress for the health of our residents," said Mayor Steven M. Fulop.

Norwood, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

Norwood is a first-time designee and was able to achieve a Healthy Town to Watch Designation amid the pandemic. In addition to responding to the pandemic, Norwood hosted its first annual Norwood Day, which was a free event that encouraged residents to spend time in nature, eat healthy foods, and engage in physical activity. The event included local business, such as health focused food trucks, yoga studios, wholistic wellness, and physical therapists. Residents had access to these wellness focused professionals and activities while remaining socially distanced and keeping safe.

“I would like to thank the Mayors Wellness Campaign, along with the Quality Institute, for designating Norwood as a 2020 New Jersey Healthy Town to Watch,” said Mayor James P. Barsa. “This incredible distinction is given to towns that promote and support healthy living for their residents. Now more than ever, mental, physical and emotional health, for all ages, should be paramount. Here in Norwood, we strive to give our residents the best opportunities for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Our Healthy Norwood Initiative will continue to bring programs and activities to our residents that will be beneficial in all facets of wellbeing. We will use all of our resources, which include our parks, hiking trails, community center, and local businesses that focus on wellness to bring diverse, fun, and educational events to the most important part of Norwood: the people who live here.”

Vernon Township, 2020 Healthy Town to Watch

This is Vernon Township's second year being designated as a Healthy Town to Watch. Throughout the pandemic, the township has focused on providing important updates and information regarding the status of the pandemic. The town implemented curb side to-go meals for the Senior Center Nutrition Site and provided a safe, accessible, covered outdoor seating area. This provided access to healthy food for the most vulnerable populations, as well as a place for much needed socialization.

“On behalf of the residents of Vernon Township, the Mayor and Council offer our thanks to the Quality Institute for designating Vernon Township as a 2020 New Jersey Healthy Town to Watch. This honor would not have been possible without the host of volunteers who serve our town on Municipal Committees such as the Board of Recreation, the Beautification Committee, the Greenway Action Advisory Committee, the Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Environmental Commission, and the Senior Citizen Committee. To make our town an even better and healthier place to live, we are in the early stages of planning a beautiful new town center walking and biking trail — all part of our efforts to move Vernon forward,” said Mayor Howard Burrell.

The following towns were designated as *2020 Healthy Towns Up-and-Coming*

Highlands Borough, 2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming

Highlands Borough spent 2020 collecting important data from its residents to gauge health needs. Top health concerns identified included: mental health and substance use issues, and concerns for the aging population. This localized data collection will set the stage to provide targeted programming in 2021 to improve the health and wellness of the communities.

‘We are honored to join the list of communities that received the Quality Institute’s designation as a 2020 Mayors Wellness Campaign Healthy Town,’ said Mayor Carolyn Broullon. “The Recreation Department and I started preparing programming in December of 2019 then launched in early January 2020. We only had a few events completed when the pandemic shutdown occurred. We quickly shifted to all outdoor and socially distant activities. Being able to achieve this status for the first time, during the pandemic, is a testament to our commitment to the health and well-being of our residents and our community. All activities centered around mental, nutritional and physical health.”

Lawrence Township, 2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming

Throughout the pandemic, Lawrence Township focused on keeping residents engaged, outside and away from their computers. Programs put in place included:

- First annual Fishing Derby.
- “Art in the Park” classes held in outdoor spaces.
- Outdoor Hula Hoop class for Senior Citizens.
- Backyard Campout Night in which packets of s’mores, flashlights and other camping materials were distributed to encourage families to pitch a tent in the backyard and enjoy the outdoors.

“On behalf of Lawrence Township (Mercer County), it is an honor to participate in the Mayors Wellness Campaign and be selected as a Healthy Town Up and Coming by The New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute,” said Mayor James Kownacki. “Helping residents to a more active and healthier lifestyle and improving the overall wellness of our community takes commitment and creativity. During a pandemic, those challenges are magnified ten times over. I offer a heartfelt ‘thank you’ to our recreation and health departments for their hard work in our residents’ service.”

Morristown, 2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming

Morristown pivoted its programming to ensure residents were informed about the pandemic by recording daily video briefings that encouraged residents to wear masks, be conscious of their health choices, and that provided other updates. Additionally, Morristown was able to collect over 6000 pounds of food through community food drives. These food drive efforts were increased due to the rise in food insecurity as a result of the pandemic.

“We are honored to be recognized by Quality Institute as a New Jersey 2020 Healthy Town Up and Coming. I am incredibly proud of this accomplishment because it demonstrates to all of us here in Morristown what makes our town great. The walkability of Morristown invites

people from all over the tri-state area. Our thriving downtown includes every cuisine you can think of with scores of healthy cafes, fitness studios, and activities. We're home to beautiful parks and historical landmarks worth venturing through, and clubs and events that promote a healthy lifestyle for all residents. Living in Morristown breeds a healthy lifestyle, and in turn, that lifestyle breeds a healthy Morristown," said Mayor Timothy Dougherty.

Princeton, 2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming

Through the Princeton Health Department, all focus was shifted to COVID-19 response. Contact tracing, flu vaccine clinics, and emergency task forces were set up to monitor the Township's response.

"Princeton is honored to be recognized as a Healthy Town to Watch by the Quality Institute," said Mayor Mark Freda of Princeton. "Amid a pandemic, we have determined that our residents' health can be greatly improved if we mobilize our community partnerships. This award is reflective of our collective teamwork, invaluable partnerships with community stakeholders, local non-profits, our schools, and the business community. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Princeton Health Department has served on the forefront of community response, through managing positive COVID cases, and mitigating transmission of COVID-19 among community members. Through engaging with innovative, virtual health communication tools, as well as utilizing vital community partnerships, our health department has been able to reach Princeton residents in an equitable, efficient manner — an achievement that we are truly proud of and will continue to work toward improving."

Willingboro, 2020 Healthy Town Up-and-Coming

The Township of Willingboro is a first-time applicant and has achieved a Healthy Town Up-and-Coming designation. Willingboro offers many activities, events, and programs to increase community engagement. The Township has increased its efforts to create a healthy neighborhood and environment by developing partnerships with various organizations to provide access to healthy foods and nutrition information. The Township has also created a community garden that will allow residents to learn how to grow sustainable food sources.

"Thank you to the Quality Institute for providing a structure that facilitates sharing what we do well in Willingboro to create a healthy space for over 33,000 residents," said Mayor Tiffani Worthy. "In 2020, we revisited how we respond to the whole person and increased our food drives and strengthened partnerships with agencies to provide COVID-19 testing, flu shots, mental health services and more. The racially motivated incidents that transpired in cities across the country required us to also take further steps to strengthen the relationship between residents and police officers, which generated a series of Citizen Forums about 21st Century Policing hosted by Willingboro Police Department. We look forward to 2021 being another healthy year in Willingboro for all of our residents."

For More Information

To learn more about the MWC, visit: <http://www.njhcqi.org/MWC> or contact Julie DeSimone at jdesimone@njhcqi.org.

About the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute

The New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute's (Quality Institute) mission is to improve the safety, quality, and affordability of health care for everyone. Our membership comes from all stakeholders in health care. Together with our 100 plus members, we are working towards a world where all people receive safe, equitable, and affordable health care and live their healthiest lives.

About the Mayors Wellness Campaign

The Mayors Wellness Campaign is a program of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. The program empowers mayors across New Jersey with evidence-based tools, strategies, and support to champion health and wellness in their communities.