Written by Ivan Phifer
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Despite the 109 heat index, Stairstep Foundation/His Works United culminated its 9th Annual Church Olympics and Health Fair activities Jun. 29. During the week of activities over 3000 people and 30 churches were involved in Roller Skating, 3x3 Basketball and Track and Field events.

Pictured: Chris Schaffer, Director of Mission Delivery for the American Diabetes Association (left) talking to a staff member.

The Stairstep Foundation founded by Alfred Babington-Johnson is a 501(c)(3) formed in 1992 with a mission to promote a strong spirit of community among African-Americans. Stairstep achieves this mission by provoking discussion and encouraging others to embrace community, as well as creating and documenting replicable models and strategies to build community.

Many health partners such as U-Care and North Point Health & Wellness, Open Cities health Clinic, manned booths dispensing vital information and provided screenings ranging from blood pressure tests to glucose readings.

Rev. Alfred Babington-Johnson explained that Stairstep has facilitated the Church Olympics as

part of a broader effort to strengthen collaboration among African American churches in the metropolitan area, since 2003. “The desired goal is demonstrate the credibility and enhance the capacity of our cooperating congregations to narrow the gap of disparate health outcomes between African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites” he said.

Stairstep has 22 health site coordinators that meet monthly to learn about health issues and fashion strategies that they implement in their respective congregations. The Church Olympics allow a celebration of the varied activities that take place throughout the year.

The first place prize was won by Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, pastored by the Rev. Billy Russell. Greater Friendship always fields a competitive team and including being this years champion that have won the 1st place trophy in three other years.

“It’s more than just placing,” said Brenda Bell, a member of the Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. “It is about getting healthy, fellowshipping and coming out to show the community church folks want to have fun too.”

Bell said Rev. Russell encouraged members of his congregations to get fit.

“Back in January, he challenged us to lose 30 pounds by June 30,” she said. Even though Bell admits jokingly she did not take part in that endeavor, she admires her pastor’s enthusiasm. “Usually people complain about being too heavy, or that they can’t do it and Pastor Russell stands at the pulpit and challenges us to get fit,” she said.

“It’s a very important event for our community,” said Babette Jamison, African and African-American Health Coordinator with the Minnesota Department of Health. “This is the opportunity for us to do a lot of health related outreach; an opportunity to reach out to people who may not have an opportunity to access this information and knowledge,” she said.

Jamison led the partnership of the Department of health with the event by providing funding to have the Southside Clinic’s Community Mobile Unit on site to provide screenings.

“One of the main things with the Office of Minority Multi-Cultural Health, is we can contribute to engaging communities in developing programs and supportive services to improve the health of our communities,” Jamison said. “It is also about hearing what the community needs, and wants, and being able to deliver those services.”

U-Care is a health insurance service for Medicaid members with Medicare plans, for low-income

individuals.

“Everyone should have their annual check-ups, immunizations and make sure they are preventing diseases,” said Dee Dee Brown, Provider Assistance Center worker. “We are here to make sure kids are healthy and staying out of trouble. U-Care represents healthy eating and healthy physical activities,” said Brown.

Brown pointed out that in the African-American community; fast food and fried foods are common place. “Eventually, it turns into high blood pressure and diabetes, which is not good in the long term,” said Brown.

The results of the competition were:
1st Place Greater FriendshipMissionary Baptist Church
2nd Place Living Word Church and Word Outreach Ministries
3rd Place Progressive Baptist Church
4th Place Wayman A.M.E
5th Place He is Risen COGIC
6th Place Greater Mt Vernon Missionary Baptist Church.

The Church Olympics and Family Outing are held annually during the fourth week of June.

“This is something we should be able to do every weekend instead of just once a year,” Jamison said.