

Lynchburg-“Where the Living Is Large”

By, Joan F. Foster, Mayor of the City of Lynchburg

In my State of City Address on February the 27th, 2012, the theme of my address stated that the City of Lynchburg was “Fit for Success”. In this address I discussed ways that we were demonstrating this success through endeavors in economic, educational and community fitness. It was pointed out that our economic fitness centered on the fact that we had added more than 517 new jobs in the last year due in part to local businesses expanding their production; this is particularly noteworthy due to the economic downturn that our country has experienced since 2008. Our community had many educational successes as well, E.C. Glass and Heritage High Schools consistently rank in the top five percent of all public high schools in the nation, in addition, this year’s Virginia Teacher of the Year is residing in our community and teaching eighth grade English Literature at one of our three local middle schools, Paul Lawrence Dunbar Middle School of Innovation. It was also lauded that many of our community successes have revealed that we are growing in population; the 2010 census cited that there are now over 75,000 residents living in Lynchburg, this is an increase of over 10,000 more residents since the last census. The demographic make-up of the City of Lynchburg is 67% white, 28% black, 2% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and less than 0.5% American Indian and Alaskan Native. The median age in Lynchburg reveals that we are becoming younger with individuals 19 and under comprising 18% of our population, while those 65 and older comprise 17% of the population. (2006-2008 US Census). The median age in Lynchburg is 33.6. We have an outstanding health care system, nationally recognized colleges, and low unemployment to boast about. So, it would seem that all is well and our City is indeed living the good life, or “living large” as the saying goes.

In March of 2010 Lynchburg captured another ranking that placed us again in a top ten poll; this one was issued by the Gallup- Healthways report. However, before we start giving each other high fives tonight or begin patting ourselves on the back about how great we are doing, I need to let you know an important fact about this ranking. In this report our fair City of Lynchburg, Virginia, and the region in which we reside, ranked in the top ten metro areas in the United States as the 8th most obese region in the nation!! This is 8th out of 185 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in the United States. A low number is not good in this case, the higher your number the better your health ranking. How can this be??? Probably, like you, I immediately thought, “oh the region, it must be those counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, and Campbell that are so unhealthy.” Well, yes, it is the region that was ranked, however, the City of Lynchburg is the largest of these localities by population in the Central Virginia Health District. So I set about doing some research and discovered that the results of

the 2010 Gallup-Healthways poll (which reflected 2009 figures) did indeed rank Lynchburg MSA as the 8th most obese area, finding 33% of the population being obese in comparison to the national average of 26.5%. Also, according to the Lynchburg Health Rankings, only 46.1% of the region reported exercising regularly, 14% of adults ranked their health fair or poor, this is above Virginia which is at 13% and the national at 10%. Other statistical information from this study revealed that adult smoking is at 22%, and that 29% of adults aged 20 and over reported BMI (Body Mass Index) at 33%, nearly 70% of adults in this region are considered overweight. (Gallup-Healthways, 2010) Furthermore, the 2010 Virginia Department of Health's Division of Chronic Disease Prevention and Control website revealed indicators in the Central Virginia Health District as follows under chronic health conditions: 11.0 % have diabetes (the state average is 7.8%), 28.9% have high blood pressure (state average is 28%), 42.3% of adults have high cholesterol (state average is 38.1%), 10% of adults have asthma (state average is 8.6%). Further information from this website revealed that per 10,000 hospitalizations that 101 in Central Virginia are admitted to the hospital for heart disease (the state is 98.1), COPD hospitalizations per 10,000 is 31.9, (the state is 26.9), diabetes hospitalizations per 10,000 is 22.1, (the state is 15.1) and asthma related hospitalizations per 10,000 is 15.1 as compared to the state at 11.8. I think that it was at this point that I concluded: "thank heavens we have a good healthcare system, we need it!"

It was also at this point that I stopped my research and came to the conclusion that facts are facts and that I had read enough. It was about this time that I heard that the 2011 Gallup-Healthways poll had been released and that we were now ranked 44rd out of 185 as unhealthy regions. We had gone up, but I felt that indeed Lynchburg and our region had some significant indicators, I concluded that we needed to do more than we were doing to get healthier outcomes. Recent research by the CDC tells us that this generation of children is the first that is not expected to live as long as their parents because of increased obesity rate, this is just unfathomable to me. Of course, there are immediate consequences of this that we can see, however the glaring fact is that most overweight children become overweight adults, which translate to more health problems, higher healthcare costs, decreased life expectancy, as well as, a lower quality of life. Over the last three decades childhood obesity rates in our nation have tripled; with one in three children in the U.S. overweight or obese. Obesity cost Americans \$150 billion in added health care cost each year. ("Let's Move Cities and Towns" Toolkit for Local Officials). I do not want this for my grandchildren's future or for the future of any child that resides in our community.

What do we do about this, what steps do we need to take to live healthy? We do not want to be defined by the measurement of our waistlines, but by the actions that we take to get big results that will take us from number 44 to one of the healthiest cities in the nation. So, how do we begin the journey to becoming a healthier community?

The Plan

The Lynchburg Health Department under the leadership Of Director Dr. Kerry Gateley lead the charge to bring about change in our health outcomes by applying for a grant from The Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The grant, entitled ACHIEVE, which is an acronym for Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and Environmental Change, was awarded to the district. It was in March of 2011 (a short year ago) that Dr. Gateley and his staff began assembling a team to bring about the community change. This change would entail creating an environment of awareness and access in which healthy options for nutrition, physical activity, tobacco control, chronic disease management and leadership are considered at all levels and in all sectors of Lynchburg. The grant also stated that members of the team must be from diverse sectors of the community, to ensure successful and accurate data collection and assessment. Dr. Gateley along with Pat Price, who represented the community at large, chaired this committee, called locally, CHART, (The Community Health Action and Response Team); and this team quickly set about “charting” our indicators in all sectors, in order to, become better educated about what existed in our fair City that was defining us as unhealthy. They were charged with evaluating five specific community sectors: healthcare, worksites, schools, community organizations and the community at large. Interviews or site visits were then held during a four month process that looked at key areas. The process entailed interviews with CEO’s, principals, medical professionals, government leaders, physical education teachers, church leaders, along with work site visits to insurance companies, banks, etc. A group of the CHART members also divided our city into 01, 02, 03, 04 zip codes and conducted walkability audit tours in neighborhoods according to the zip code. They looked for availability of healthy food, walkability of the community, and assessing if the community was built for physical activity. The culminating results concluded: we needed healthier food options in all sectors of our community, as well as, in other aspects of our lives, more physical activity was needed by a broader range of individuals, more worksites needed to reward and advocate for healthier options in the work place, the school system needed to revise their school wellness policies, and more partnerships needed to be forged with the academic community to identify, mobilize and implement healthier options on campuses.

Then in September of 2011, after all the data had been collected and analyzed the CHART team established a vision to create an environment of awareness and access in which healthy options are considered at all levels and in all sectors. Their mission stated that they would engage with influential people in every sector to stimulate discussion about healthy options, educate the community about the problem, and offer suggestions for healthier options and ways to implement strategies to accomplish this. One of the important strategies included mobilizing an army of advocates who would commit to making health a priority. They outlined five goals to be reached by September of 2013:

- Increase the percent of Lynchburg City permits issued for special events and city neighborhood centers that incorporate guidelines for including healthy options(food/nutrition, physical activity, tobacco- free)
- Increase the number of community nonprofits, churches, universities, and colleges that advocate and implement healthy options for nutrition, physical activity and tobacco cessation through work with grantees, sponsored events and meetings
- Increase the number of schools that are compliant with revised district school wellness policy
- Increase the number of academic partnerships with local universities to mobilize and identify healthy strategies on campus and in the community
- Increase the number of business organizations that are actively engaged in healthy strategies

No easy task for any committee or a community, however from September 2011 to January of 2012, steps towards these goals began to materialize and come to fruition; some of the stakeholders began initiating approaches to lower our obesity rates. Some of these efforts were:

Lynchburg City Schools through the School Health Advisory Board, began revising the school wellness policy that will include evidence-based practices to advocate enhanced health promotion and education

The Mayor's Youth Council held a "Lighten Up Lynchburg" walk in October to raise awareness about obesity

Region 2000 conducted annual walk and bike to work weeks and coordinated several Safe Routes to School grants that promoted students walking or biking to their neighborhood schools (a side bar here, June Brody in her article "Communities Learn the

Good Life Can be a Killer” stated that in 1974 66% of all school aged children walked or biked to school by 2000 that number had dropped to 13%)

Top-level CEOs met to discuss the connection between wellness and business/economic development and established plans to work together to help small businesses implement strategies to improve the health of their employees

Lynchburg Grows and the Hill City Master Gardeners demonstrated interest in developing school and community gardens, as well as expanding Co-Op and Community Supported Agriculture opportunities

The City’s Parks and Recreation Department committed to healthy, active living and began pursuing changes in their own systems to support the movement to incorporate healthy strategies in all their decisions

These efforts were the beginning of the process, but there was one important last step remaining which would be the component that would be the impetus to pulling the entire community together around this live healthy initiative. In order to launch this last step two local doctors, Dr. Rachel Gagen, a Pediatrician, and Dr. Mark Townsend, a Pediatric Cardiologist, along with Leslie Hogle, Senior Health Educator at the Lynchburg Health Department approached yours truly, to champion and to publicly launch a long-term sustainable approach that would tackle our obesity problem. Their proposal was to have our City sign on as a participant in First Lady Michelle Obama’s effort “Let’s Move, Cities and Towns”. The one overarching goal of this initiative is to solve the problem of obesity, particularly childhood obesity, within the next generation. I quickly realized that they were looking to the City and its’ Mayor to provide the critical leadership that was needed to bring the community together and to ignite some action toward their goals. So, as any good leader would do, the Mayor, quickly turned to greater leaders for advice, specifically Kimball Payne, our City Manager and Bonnie Svrcek, Deputy City Manager, who also chairs our Sustainability Committee for the City, (a City committee that works to promote a healthy and sustainable City that is focused on social, cultural, economic and environmental vitality, now and for future generations). Their concern was if we applied to this national movement did we (city government) have to agree to make at least one change in four main aspects of the “Let’s Move” initiative? These pillars were: give parents and caregivers the tools they need to make healthy choices in early childhood, improve nutrition in schools, increase physical activity opportunities and make healthy food affordable and accessible. The City did not have the resources or the manpower to do this; however, we were quickly reassured by all the stakeholders and the CHART committee that they would proceed forward with executing the necessary steps to reach the goals of the initiative. They needed the City to sign on as a supporter in spirit (not in city money!!) and for the Mayor to be

the city's cheerleader who would raise awareness of the efforts of the movement. So, the Mayor signed up for the job, with blessings from our City Manager and Deputy City Manager. The initiative, "Live Healthy Lynchburg", was coined and on February the 27th, 2012, the "Let's Move Initiative" was launched at the State of the City Address. At this address, a representative from the White House, Joann Grossi, announced that we had been accepted as an official "Let's Move City". Ms. Grossi stated that she was thrilled that Lynchburg had accepted the challenge to become a healthier community. She related that the United States is the heaviest country in the world and last year our country spent \$371 billion in treating weight related health problems. How do we put actions to words to accomplish our committee's goals and develop our own local solutions to this national epidemic?

The Journey toward a "Live Healthy Lynchburg" Community

In The City Address our four pillars were announced as: **Eat Healthy, Work Healthy, Learn Healthy and Play Healthy**. Under each heading there is a plan of action for the next year, and hopefully for the duration, until we become one of the healthiest cities in the United States.

The "**Eat Healthy**" pillar of the movement strives to make healthy food affordable and accessible. The main component of this pillar is to create a baby friendly hospital that strives to improve the breast-feeding rates and retention rates of breast-fed babies after discharge from the hospital. Lynchburg follows national trends in regard to this, 75% of mothers discharged from the hospital after delivery are breast-feeding; however, only 10% are at six months. Studies show that babies that are exclusively breast-fed have multiple health benefits, and most importantly, breast-feeding decreases the risk of obesity by 25%. Centra has begun the process to achieve a "Baby Friendly" hospital designation. Across America there are only 116 hospitals with this designation, there are thousands internationally. In January of 2012, nurses participated in a webinar and joined a coalition that will assist the hospital in moving toward an exclusive breast-feeding hospital culture, and to obtaining this status.

The second goal under this pillar is to eliminate the "Food Deserts" in Lynchburg. The United States Department of Agriculture defines a food dessert as an area where residents in a certain areas have limited access to affordable, nutritional food. Lynchburg has food desserts, according to Dr. John Abell of Randolph College, who conducted studies in Lynchburg on this. He found them located in our downtown area; his studies concluded that some of the consequences of living in a food dessert are poor nutrition, diabetes, and obesity. According to the USDA, Lynchburg has eight areas that are food desserts. These areas have over 24,000 residents; in two of these 24% of the residents are children. (The News & Advance January 29, 2012). Dr. Abell's students walked the 24504 zip code area, where there is limited access to

grocery stores, and found that the availability of fresh produce in convenience stores in this area is very limited. They found that there were more beer and soda options than milk choices. When the CHART members walked the 24504 area in the summer of 2011 they found one banana in the convenience stores around the White Rock and James River Crossing areas.

Kay Frazier, Director of Parks and Recreation, reports that two independent studies have shown that our existing Community Market, which is located in the 24504 zip code and has been continuously opened since 1783; this market does not adequately use the space to its benefit. The present market vendors do not accept the Snap Card, (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamps). Many living in this area are low income and do not have access to reliable transportation that would help them to travel to supermarkets where there are healthier choices. The poverty rate in Lynchburg is 20.7%; this is nearly double the rate of the state. (News and Advance, January 29, 2012). A solution to help with this problem is to expand the market offerings to make food more accessible to low-income by accepting the SNAP card. It has also been proposed to model a Chicago-based program called Fresh Moves here in our community. The City of Chicago equipped a used city transit bus and created a mobile farmer's market that takes nutritional food into the inner city regions. A grant has been submitted to replicate this model here and if awarded a bus will be equipped for Lynchburg Grows, our urban farm that grows produce year round, to take fresh produce into our food deserts. What a great vision!! Lynchburg will have a bus traveling to our food deserts to provide access to not only fresh food but also nutritional information that will help the residents in these impoverished areas make healthier choices. Included in the Eat Healthy pillar the faith community will be encouraged to incorporate health education and awareness into their outreach efforts as well as offering healthy options to their congregations.

The second pillar, **“Work Healthy”**, is being spearheaded by the Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce, along with Genworth and Centra Health. According to the “Healthy Workforce-2012 and Beyond”, a report issued by the Partnership for Prevention and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce indicated the following:

- A significant percentage of deaths in the United States are associated with modifiable, lifestyle-related behaviors. More than one-third of total mortality is attributed to just three general factors: tobacco use, poor diet/low physical activity (and their influence on obesity), and excessive alcohol consumption.
- Because employer health costs are unsustainable, employers are decreasing or eliminating employee health benefits and shifting more costs onto their employees

- Findings from 56 studies of worksite health promotion and prevention programs showed an average of:

- *27% reduction in sick leave absenteeism

- *26% reduction in health care costs

- *32% reduction in worker's compensation and disability management cost claims

These three businesses will lead the charge in reducing the risk of obesity in early childhood and the workplace. Genworth will encourage small businesses to develop wellness tools to measure outcomes and improve the health of employees. The Chamber along with Centra and Genworth has developed a comprehensive web portal that will provide a place for companies to register to participate, track individual employee and company engagement, as well as, resources to assist companies in creating or improving worksite wellness programs. A Work Healthy Coalition has been formed to encourage community dialogues and encourage business leaders to invest in worksite health, leadership, and workplace wellness. There will be two signature events that will bring in world-renowned speakers to inspire and teach attendees how to create and sustain positive change. These signature events will also include physical activity components that stress how important it is to have infrastructure that supports a walker-friendly community as well as activities that support the overall well-being of the individual. One of these speakers will be Mark Fenton in May of 2012. Mr. Fenton will speak on walkable communities, at the conclusion of his talk he will take participants on a walk through a walker friendly community; he will then contrast this walk to a non-walker friendly community. Mark's website is <http://markfenton.com/>. On October 12-13 of 2012, Jeff Evans, who is legally blind, will speak on walking and hiking and the importance of physical activity. He will complete his inspirational message with a walk/hike, Jeff's website is <http://www.mountain-vision.com/speaking-overview.html>. The ultimate goals of the Work Healthy pillar are: to measure the number of companies implementing worksite wellness programs, to improve worksite health risk assessment data, and to implement in more sites policy, system and environmental changes that support health and wellness.

The third pillar, "**Learn Healthy**" strives to provide healthier foods in schools while incorporating wellness into education. The School Health Advisory Board for Lynchburg City Schools, after receiving the CHART committees' assessment of the schools' policies and environment, realized that it was time to revise the current wellness policy to include best practices that were established by the USDA, CDC, and the U.S. Department of Education. This will include policies related to vending machine nutrition, foods used for class parties, and the nutritional content of food sold for fundraisers. Furthermore in February of 2012, the schools conducted The Youth Risk Behavior Survey with 6th, 9th, and 12th graders to gauge the health and wellness status of our school's youth. After the results of this assessment are known the school wellness policies will be revised and training will be put in place that will assist teachers, food service/nutrition professionals, parents and students on the change with the ultimate goal of improving the health of our school aged children as well all the staff at each school. Grant funding will be sought to initiate a training program for our elementary school teachers. This

program, Playworks, was designed to assist low-income schools at recess and throughout the school day to use play and physical activity to build positive school environments. Their philosophy of play focuses on five areas of improvement: active recess time, activity throughout the entire day, class game time, interscholastic/developmental sports leagues, and out-of-school programs. Other components of this pillar include continuing the mentorship program at Jubilee, called Lynchburg Challenge. In the Lynchburg Challenge program, LC and LU students mentor Jubilee attendees in good nutrition and movement. The YMCA and The Centra Wellness Clinic will work together to encourage change in morbidly obese children and the Lynchburg Family Medicine group will teach and encourage physicians to confront patient obesity through modular sessions.

The fourth and last pillar, **“Play Healthy”** is my personal favorite because I issued the challenge on February the 27th for this community to get healthy and commit to losing 12 tons in 2012. That’s correct; Lynchburg is going on a diet!!! In one year’s time citizens who live, work, learn, and play in our community are asked to lose 24,000 pounds or 12 tons. Thanks to the generosity of Centra Foundation and The Lynchburg Chamber of Commerce a “Live Healthy Lynchburg” website portal has been launched so citizens can register and track their weight-loss. This website, www.livehealthylynchburg.com also contain resources to assist individuals in their weight loss, healthy recipes, success stories and dates of upcoming activities that encourage healthy living. On Saturday, March the 10th, 199 individuals had signed up on the program’s website and collectively reported losing 207 pounds since January 1, 2012. In addition to losing weight, the Mayor encouraged residents to “strive for five” which is a commitment to some form of physical activity for at least thirty minutes a day-five days a week, thus, the phrase, “Strive for Five”. Physical activity is also tracked on the website, the number of miles walked or ran as of March 10, 2012, is 346 miles. The Lynchburg Parks and Recreation will also encourage more use of our 850 acres of playgrounds, trails, athletic fields, as well as areas that encourage running, biking, skateboarding, and just simply playing. The YMCA is planning to equip a mobile gym bus to travel to low-income areas so that residents who do not have the ability to join the Y will have easy access to fitness equipment and safe exercise.

Recently Lynchburg has been recognized and received the designation as a “Runner Friendly Community” by the Road Runners of America. This designation shines a spotlight on our City, and it says that we are on the right track, however, will still need to reach all levels of the community in order to reduce disparity and encourage everyone to make a change. There will be more of an attempt by event organizers to encourage more participation not only in the 39th Virginia Ten Miler, but also, in other races/walks, like The 3rd Annual Lighten Up Lynchburg 5k Walk/Run held by the Mayor’s Youth Council. The City of Lynchburg recognizes healthy and active living as a critical part of its’ Sustainable Lynchburg initiative; therefore, by September of 2012 the Parks and Recreation will increase the number of Lynchburg permits for special events and City neighborhood centers that incorporate guidelines for including healthy options. Neighborhood Centers will also receive training on how to include healthy options focused on physical activity, nutrition and tobacco-free events.

As you came in tonight, I offered you a selection of food to raise your awareness of your choice of items that you select to eat. There were healthy selections and not so healthy selections. Half of the food items were actually in line with the "Harvard Eating Plate" which was created by nutrition experts at The Harvard School of Public Health. This plate is an updated and healthier version of the food pyramid that we had in our day. The Harvard plate's components consist of the following:

- Fill half of your plate with vegetables and fruits-the more color the better. Potatoes and French fries do not count as healthy on this plate (fruits, vegetables, and potato chips were on my plate tonight)
- Save a quarter of your plate for whole grain-not just any grains-whole wheat, brown rice over white rice and bread (whole wheat and non-whole wheat (white ones)crackers were on my plate tonight)
- Put a healthy source of protein on one quarter of your plate-choose fish,, chicken, beans, nuts-limit red meat and processed meats (there were nuts and processed meats on my tray to demonstrate this tonight)
- Use healthy plant oils-like canola, olive, soy-limit butter(I had nuts that were cooked in soy on my plate, the cupcakes had butter)
- Drink water, coffee or tea-limit milk and dairy products to one or two a day, avoid sugary drinks and juices (I had both what did you choose?)
- Stay active-the red figure is a reminder to stay active, half the secret to weight control (how many did 30 minutes of activity today?)

How did you do tonight when the food was offered to you...did you choose healthy or unhealthy??

So there you have it, 2012 will be the year of healthy living for Lynchburg, but it's only the start. I want you to think about yourself, your family, your friends, your neighbors and how good health is important to all. So I am issuing you a challenge tonight choose just one thing that you can do to take steps toward eating healthy, working healthy, learning healthy, and playing healthy-so that you can live healthy. Choose just one thing, this means you do not have to do everything that is recommended but select 'just one thing" you can do to do your part toward creating a healthier community- a community where the living is largely healthy, not largely obese. Ah... it is a great day to be alive and to be living large in Lynchburg!!!!

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HEALTHY EATING PLATE

Use healthy oils (like olive and canola oil) for cooking, on salad, and at the table. Limit butter. Avoid trans fat.



The more veggies—and the greater the variety—the better. Potatoes and french fries don't count.

Eat plenty of fruits of all colors.



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The Nutrition Source
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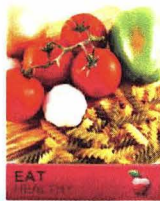
Drink water, tea, or coffee (with little or no sugar).
Limit milk/dairy (1-2 servings/day) and juice (1 small glass/day).
Avoid sugary drinks.

Eat whole grains (like brown rice, whole-wheat bread, and whole-grain pasta).
Limit refined grains (like white rice and white bread).

Choose fish, poultry, beans, and nuts; limit red meat; avoid bacon, cold cuts, and other processed meats.

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who We Are

Our mission is to create a healthy, vibrant community for all. We are committed to providing the resources and support you need to live a healthy life. We are committed to providing the resources and support you need to live a healthy life. We are committed to providing the resources and support you need to live a healthy life.

HELP LYNCHBURG GET HEALTHY!

REGISTER NOW TO TRACK YOUR WEIGHT! [REGISTER](#)

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ACHIEVE

ACTION COMMUNITIES FOR HEALTH, INNOVATION & ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Healthy Communities

Vision

To create an environment of awareness and access in which healthy options are considered at all levels and in all sectors of Lynchburg, VA.

Mission

- Engage with influential people in every community sector to stimulate the discussion about healthy options.
- Educate in all sectors about healthy options and how to implement policy, system, and environmental strategies.
- Mobilize an army of advocates who will commit to making health a priority in all organizing and decision-making.

“Make the healthy choice the easy choice!”

Partners of Live Healthy Lynchburg & ACHIEVE

- City of Lynchburg
- Centra
- Virginia Department of Health (Lynchburg Health Department)
- Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Lynchburg City Schools
- Lynchburg College
- Liberty University
- YMCA of Central Virginia
- United Way of Central Virginia
- The Virginia Region 2000 Partnership

Initiatives of Live Healthy Lynchburg & ACHIEVE

- Baby-Friendly Hospital
- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (LCS)
- Fresh Moves Bus / Food Co-Op Development
- Lynchburg Challenge
- Special Event Permits
- Academic Partnerships
- Revision of LCS Wellness Policy
- Business and Workplace Wellness Events