



Kristina Abernathy poses with Florida State University medical students.

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Health coalition holds community events

By Kristina Abernathy
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Efforts to increase the awareness among the community concerning critical issues such as safe sleep, diabetes, obesity and hypertension were made possible through a March of Dimes grant awarded to Capital Area Healthy Start Coalition's (CAHSC).

As a result, two "Chat and Chew" events were planned and implemented. On Saturday, July 19, Leon and Wakulla County residents had the opportunity to visit the Southside Arts Complex and Wakulla One Stop Community Center, respectively.

CAHSC and community partners presented to women and their families regarding critical issues women should be aware of during their child-bearing years ages 15 - 44.

A safe sleep demonstration was conducted that allowed participants to observe how a baby should be properly placed on his or her back to sleep. Babies should be alone on a firm sleep surface, without blankets, pillows, bumper pads, stuffed animals and toys.

Even before women become pregnant, they should maintain a healthy diet by eating nutri-

tious foods and exercising. Women who are overweight or obese during pregnancy are at an increased risk for experiencing miscarriages and stillbirth.

The audience learned that taking a multivitamin daily that has 400 micrograms of folic acid before and during early pregnancy can help prevent birth defects of the brain and spine called neural tube defects, and birth defects in a baby's mouth called cleft lip and palate.

Creating a reproductive health plan and controlling diabetes is important in order to have a healthy baby. Asking one's doctor the necessary steps to take before getting pregnant is critical. A woman can develop gestational diabetes during pregnancy, but can consult with her physician regularly to make a plan to keep her blood sugar in control.

Hypertension, or high blood pressure can be dangerous for both the mother and the baby. Women with high blood pressure are more likely to have certain complications during pregnancy than those with normal blood pressure. High blood pressure increases your risk for a number of preg-

nancy complications, including preterm birth, placental abruption and stillbirth.

Guests had the opportunity to visit vendors' tables to learn more about each organization. While visiting with the vendors, participants enjoyed healthy snacks that were donated. Door prizes such as pack 'n plays and sleep sacks were given away to guests who completed a pre- and post-test with questions pertaining to preconception and interconception health.

Overall, the events were a success, and attendees received valuable information they can apply in their lives. "Living a healthy lifestyle and preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity are key to improving birth outcomes," explains Kristy Goldwire, Executive Director of CAHSC. "Events such as the Healthy Start Chat & Chew allow families to learn more about healthy lifestyles so they can apply it to their daily routines."

Capital Area Healthy Start Coalition appreciates the presenters and community partners, donors and volunteers for helping make the Chat & Chew a successful event.