

# PRINT-Grant Sparks Creative Child Health Efforts

Galesburg business owners Mark and Jeanette Kleine believe a life of good health begins in childhood and two years ago, the couple invested \$1.5 million dollars in efforts to advance good health for kids in their community.

OSF HealthCare Saint Mary Medical Center President Jennifer Junis says the local business owners were not interested in bricks and mortar but rather programs that would build a community culture of improved fitness, nutrition and mental health, particularly for children.

The Kleine Pediatric Wellness Center, which is the name for programs to support better pediatric health, is tapping a steering committee with representatives from across the community, which has set goals and is now executing strategies. The most recent effort provided free flu vaccines to some elementary school children in Galesburg and surrounding rural areas.

“By starting a small pilot of giving flu immunizations last school year and then expanding that this school year, we felt that by doing that we were putting money and resources where we needed to to keep the pediatric population healthy and well and in school so they could continue to grow and develop,” according to Junis.

The steering committee has a goal of reducing school absenteeism by two percent in the next couple of years.

Director of Educational Resources at OSF Saint Mary’s Connie Wessels, a registered nurse, says flu immunizations targeted fourth and fifth graders – a population for which the vaccine can be effective with just *one* dose. Parents were alerted early in the school year and were asked to sign consent forms.

Wessels said she worked to educate parents about the need.

“Kids can get very, very ill from the flu ... very, very ill so whatever we can do to prevent that from happening, that’s what we want to do.”

A born educator, Wessels, also occasionally seizes the opportunity during the immunizations to deliver some other health-related messages to her captive students.

“The hand hygiene ... hand-washing with the kids. Then, you can also even talk about ‘Hey do you want to be a nurse some day? What a great job as far as a career opportunity.’ I can do that as well,” she offered.

## **Other Kleine-supported Efforts**

OSF Galesburg Clinic and OSF HealthCare Children’s Hospital of Illinois are also providing input on programs that have a track record of successful outcomes. For example, the steering committee also launched a pilot “Walking School Bus” that included recruiting and screening volunteers to walk students to school from one of two bus stops where parents dropped off children.

Junis said it helped adults and children get in a lot more steps every day.

“We had our stop sign and our vests and we played games with the kids and we got really great feedback from the teachers that by kids walking ... getting that first morning activity, they were able to focus and the kids really enjoyed it,” she said.

OSF Saint Mary’s is also providing expertise to school leaders who want to create their own wellness teams. The community collaborative will partner with organizations such as the YMCA and Bridgeway, a non-profit in several Central and Western Illinois communities that works to remove barriers to community services.

In an effort to make sure children’s mental health issues are diagnosed and treated early, the Kleine Pediatric Wellness initiative includes making sure all primary care doctors and pediatricians screen every child for behavioral health issues.

In a recent Knox College Alumni profile, the Kleines said they believe Galesburg is making all the right investments: in education, infrastructure and the arts and with the couple’s help, that list grows to include better health and wellness for children who represent the future of the community.