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**'TWEENS' HEALTHY HABITS SHOWCASED
BY EXCELA HEALTH ON BILLBOARDS AROUND COUNTY**

GREENSBURG, PA, May 30, 2014 ...Showmanship, athleticism, self-confidence are just a few of the benefits derived from adopting healthy habits. Winners of Excela Health's middle school essay contest have improved their well-being by practicing a variety of behaviors which will be showcased on billboards around Westmoreland County prior to the start of the new school year in August.

Eleven area middle schoolers were chosen for their commitment to habits that contribute to a long and disease-free life. They were selected from hundreds of entries submitted during the April contest period. "Healthy habits must be cultivated at an early age to ensure lasting results," said Jennifer Miele, Excela health Vice President of Marketing and Communications. "At a time when adolescents are exploring their independence and challenged to distance themselves from risky behaviors, we are accentuating the positive to inspire our community and encourage widespread and long-term participation in these healthy lifestyle choices."

Participating districts include Franklin Regional, Greater Latrobe, Greensburg Central Catholic, Greensburg Salem, Hempfield Area, Ligonier Valley, Jeannette, Mount Pleasant Area, Norwin and Penn-Trafford. Health education assemblies sponsored by Excela Health were held in each district during which time the winning student was announced publicly. Billboard production is being underwritten by Latrobe Area Hospital Charitable Foundation, Westmoreland/Frick Hospital Foundation, Latrobe Area Hospital Aid Society and

Westmoreland Hospital Auxiliary. The vendors are also discounting monthly rental fees to show their support of healthy communities.

Meditation promotes self-awareness and instills a sense of inner peace for Franklin Regional eight-grader Vishal Pandey. The son of Vinod and Radha Panday of Murrysville meditates daily to prepare for school. “It is like rehab for the mind!” he says. Coupled with yoga, meditation is both relaxing and challenging for the teen. “I feel I can actually think straight when I’m ‘in the zone.’ I feel like my bond with God grows there. I feel more fearless, stronger and even happier when I’m there. Overall, I feel better.”

Softball lets Lauren Sigut stay active, stay healthy and stay moving while having fun. This Greater Latrobe seventh-grader sees benefits on and off the field. “Whenever you run the bases, your cardiovascular strength is improved, and when you catch a fly ball, you have to calculate the location and time it will land, hopefully in your glove, making your brain a little bit brighter than the other stars in the sky. It also helps your teamwork and ‘people skills’. Another bonus: the daughter of Don and Holly Sigut of Unity Township found her grade in physical education improved as a result of regular play.

Conditioning means everything to Livia Taormina, a member of HotCheer All Stars, a competitive cheerleading squad. The 13-year-old daughter of Darrin and RoseAnn Taormina of North Huntingdon gets a workout while perfecting the acrobatics, gymnastics and face-paced dancing that have earned this Greensburg Central Catholic seventh-grader national recognition. “I go to practice three to four nights every week where we challenge our bodies to make us strong. These workouts are hard on your muscles so to help my body stay in good health, I try to eat as best as I can.”

Slam! Bang! That’s the sound of Madison Wood’s feet slamming hard on the dance floor. The Greensburg Salem sixth-grader discovered Irish step dancing during a family vacation to Busch Gardens. The daughter of Eva and Chris Wood of Greensburg entered her first Feis, which means competition, at age 10 and placed in the top five for her jig, reel and hornpipe. “After those competitions I pushed myself even harder,” with first place results.

Morgan Podkul, sixth-grader at Hempfield Area's Wendover Middle School, has been dancing since first grade. Says the daughter of Mark and Kelly Podkul, "Dance keeps me in shape, providing me with cardiovascular exercise, flexibility and muscle strength, which is especially important for me since I have been diagnosed with scoliosis and need to wear a brace 14 hours a day. In addition, dance is also a social activity for me because most of my friends are from dance. Dance keeps me active and feeling good about myself."

When Joshua Struble takes the field, it could be with a football in hand, or maybe a trumpet. The Jeannette Middle School seventh-grader is perfecting his social skills, hand-eye coordination and endurance as part of these team activities. "I am an active kid, I drink plenty of water and I follow a healthy diet because every night my mom or grandma makes a balanced nutritious meal. My family, especially my mom (Heidi Guy), supports me in my activities and keeps me away from bad things. I want to have a lot of healthy habits because I want to live a long life and not have dramatic things happen to me like heart attack or stroke.. Many member of both sides of my family have had this and I don't want to have to suffer like they did."

Ligonier Valley eighth-grader Madelynn Lancashire follows in her sisters' award-winning footsteps as a member of the Chestnut Ridge 4-Club showing livestock, specifically sheep and goats. "Not only do I have to stay clean, fit and healthy, I have to eat right, exercise properly and be one that stands out as a good showman. And just as I have to be physically and mentally fit for this, I have to make sure the animals I show and raise are healthy, clean and fit as well."

The daughter of Dawnna and Jason Lancashire of Ligonier Township said showing livestock is an amazing experience. "The one quote that you always hear during the show season is 'work, sweat and pure determination is all it takes for your idol, to become your rival,'" she said.

Zach Charlesworth has been wrestling since age 4, inspired by his older brother to take to the mat. For the Mount Pleasant Area eighth-grader .it's a way of life with family and coaches encouraging his pursuit. The son of Cindy and Dave Charlesworth admits "it takes a lot of focus and dedication, and healthy eating to maintain your weight

for meets and tournaments. And being occupied with wrestling has helped avoid any drugs or underage drinking.”

Jason Bevington credits his father with pointing him to weight training as a means to prepare for football, wrestling and basketball. The son of Scott and Marilyn Bevington of North Huntingdon says weight training has helped to build his confidence as he works out three times a week with his dad. Bike riding with his brother and healthy eating also help keep this Norwin eight-grader in shape.

Nick Pisani’s healthy habit is also his favorite sport – fencing. The Penn Middle School eighth-grader sees fencing as more than sword fighting. “Footwork is a huge part in fencing your opponent. You can either advance, retreat, jump back or jump forward. You must be careful about your footwork or it will lead to other mistakes, such as falling or making your lunges short of your opponent.” The son of Lori and Nick Pisani III of Harrison City practices daily to incorporate new strategies for tournament competition. “With hard work and dedication fencing makes me healthy physically and mentally,” he added.

What’s cooking at Dana Baird’s house? Healthier meals and packed lunches for the Trafford Middle School eighth-grader. The daughter of Judy Walason enjoys preparing dinner for family and knowing that there are “no artificial preservatives or harmful chemicals that can hurt you in the long run.” Making meal time family time also promotes togetherness and encourages everyone to eat better.