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ASBURY PARK

A HEALTHIER CORNER STORE KICKS OFF IN ASBURY PARK Gratis Snacks, Healthy Recipe Cards & Health Screenings Offered

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By Michelle Gladden



For many people the dash into a bodega or corner store is done to purchase an item of immediate need or to pick up a snack to stave off a hunger pang. But this often not the case for those living near small shops.

According to a 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment, over 62 percent of Asbury Park residents are overweight and 15 percent of adults

find it hard to access fresh produce and healthy food. Health concerns are further exacerbated since 34 percent of residents do not have a car and depend on corner stores for their weekly groceries.

Now, an initiative launched by EZ Ride, in conjunction with the Alliance for a Healthier Asbury Park, the Mayor's Wellness Committee, and Hackensack Meridian Health is working to help transform the predominantly packaged food options with some healthier food items, including fruits, vegetables, and healthier snacks and drinks.

Funded by a small grant from the State's Healthy Corner Store Initiative, four corner stores have signed on thus far – La Tapatia on Main Street, Prime Convenience Market on Asbury Avenue, Sheffield's Market on Bangs Avenue, and the newly opened Dark City Grill on Prospect Avenue.

The initiative formally kicked off Friday at Prime Convenience Market with an array healthier after school snacks options, healthy recipes, and free health screenings, organizer Lisa Lee of EZ Ride and Alliance For A Healthier Asbury Park said. It also provides signs, equipment and training for store owners on how to sell fresh produce and make a profit.

“The motivation for the effort is to reduce obesity and the impact of chronic diseases which are linked to increased levels of obesity and the consumption of sugary drinks and packaged and fast foods,” Lee said. The same initiative is underway in Long Branch Neptune City and Plainfield.

On Friday afternoon, EZ Ride's team gave out 81 samples of fresh pineapple, 58 samples of fresh watermelon, healthier



recipe cards, and information on how to buy and prepare fresh produce and healthier snacks for children in both English and Spanish in front of the store on the sidewalk, Lee said. They also gave out 68 coupons for customers to get free items deemed healthier choices in the store.

Customers redeemed their coupons to get 70 snack size bags of popcorn, 16 bananas, 13 cans of 100 percent pineapple juice, 12 bags of pretzels, three apples and a bottle of spring water; all for free. Eight people took advantage of the free health screening offered in the store by Hackensack Meridian

Health nurses and received a total of 48 health screenings. Each customer was tested for blood pressure, pulse, cholesterol, blood sugar, stroke risk and BMI [body mass index]. Counseling was given based on test results.

For more information about the program and how to participate, email [**llee@ezride.org**](mailto:llee@ezride.org).