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Tampa YMCA to Launch Veggie Van - A Mobile Market Place

Tampa, FL (June 17, 2015) – The [Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA](#) is launching a mobile market place, called the Veggie Van, to meet the needs of individuals and families living in underserved areas of Hillsborough County. Through a refrigerated truck, the Y will distribute fresh, nutritious food such as fruits and vegetables into targeted communities, which are labeled food deserts. A food desert is defined as an urban neighborhood without ready access to fresh, healthy and affordable food.

Currently, the Y's Veggie Van has planned distributions in the communities of Wimauma Village, Tampa Heights, Sulphur Springs and Ladoochee. Each of these locations has a demonstrated need for nutritional wellness. Other communities may be added depending on need. Community food distributions will take place every two weeks on a rotating basis. **An unveiling ceremony is planned at the Bob Gilbertson Central City Family YMCA on 110 E. Palm Avenue in Tampa on Friday, July 10th from 12:00 - 1:30 p.m., followed by an inaugural Veggie Van produce distribution for pre-qualified families from 1:30 - 4:00 p.m.**

The Tampa Y is working with local farmers and growers (under the guidance of the municipal and state health departments) to provide seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables to residents at specific distribution locations. Participants for the program are pre-screened by local partners to include service clubs, schools and churches. Children and families receiving free or reduced-price lunches will automatically qualify and only need to sign up for the service. The mobile market place has a nutritionist on staff to work with families on improving food preparation and cooking habits to minimize the risk of obesity, chronic disease and high blood pressure. Working with residents to make good nutrition decisions, while maintaining a commitment to cultural food norms and traditions, is a vital objective of the Veggie Van.

The Tampa YMCA is able to launch the Veggie Van thanks to generous funding from the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, The Joy McCann Foundation and Bank of America. Additionally, the Florida Department of Agriculture has played a key advisory role in developing the mobile market place concept and moving it forward. The funding covers operational support, start-up costs and staffing of the Veggie Van, which is housed at the Central City Y.

What is a Mobile Market Place?

A mobile market place is a method of food distribution via a vehicle that provides for direct distribution to individuals and families in need. Mobile market places offer flexibility of delivery and allow providers to target underserved areas. This food delivery method helps to remove barriers to individual access, and expand food distribution capacity.

What is a Food Desert?

Food deserts are located at least one mile from the nearest supermarket, supercenter or large grocery store in urban areas and more than ten miles in rural areas. Many residents who live in food deserts do not have a vehicle and rely on walking or public transportation. It becomes easier and less time-consuming to go to convenience stores and gas stations, which provide few, if any, healthy or nutritious food choices. At most of these stores, prices are inflated, food is processed and choices are limited. In

metropolitan Tampa, there are 40 locations deemed food deserts. As the Y studied the 40 locations, it became clear that limited access to healthy foods plays a significant role in poor dietary decisions.

Why is a Mobile Market Place Important for Tampa Bay?

Only 20 percent of residents in Hillsborough County meet the recommended five-a-day servings of fruit and vegetables. In underserved communities, the statistic drops to below 8.5 percent. People trying to feed their families with lower incomes face a double impact as food costs at stores in food deserts are usually significantly higher than food costs at stores in larger communities. Nutritious, perishable food, such as fruits and vegetables are especially high in cost. The Veggie Van will increase access to those living below poverty and the working poor. By increasing access in food deserts, more individuals will receive food benefits, and less will go hungry. In addition, individuals in need will receive timely access to nutritious food.

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About the Tampa Y

The Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA is one of the area's leading nonprofits, strengthening Hillsborough and East Pasco communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the Association, 19 facilities engage more than 160,000 men, women and children — regardless of age, income or background — to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve our community's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. The Tampa Y has long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. www.tampaymca.org