The Villages: USF Dean encourages residents to be proactive when it comes to their well-being

EVALUATING YOUR HEALTH

By APRIL TOLER
DAILY SUN

THE VILLAGES — Although Kathy McCarty has spent her life in the health care field, the Village of Belvedere resident is always looking for ways to educate herself about health topics.

So when she heard about one of the University of South Florida’s “Tomorrow’s Health Today” lectures being presented Tuesday in The Villages, she and her husband Mike headed out to learn more ways they can stay healthy and happy.

“(When you get older) you want to keep your health what you have now and make it better if you can,” Kathy said.

Tuesday’s lecture featured Donna Petersen, senior associate vice president, USF dean of the College of Public Health, who spoke on the topic “How Healthy

See HEALTH, A3

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Donna Petersen, senior associate vice president, USF dean of the College of Public Health, gives a presentation on “How Healthy Am I and What Can I Do About It?” on Tuesday at Savannah Center for the ‘Tomorrow’s Health Today’ lecture series.

George Horsford
Daily Sun
Residents listen during Tuesday’s lecture entitled ‘How Healthy Am I and What Can I Do About It?’ at Savannah Center. The lecture was the first in the ‘Tomorrow’s Health Today’ series, which will feature a number of speakers from USF Health. The series is part of The Villages-USF Health partnership geared toward making the community ‘America’s Healthiest Hometown.’

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Am I and What Can I Do About It?

The lecture, held at Savannah Center, was the first in the “Tomorrow’s Health Today” series, which will feature a number of speakers from USF covering a wide range of health topics. It’s part of a partnership between The Villages and USF Health aimed at making the community ‘America’s Healthiest Hometown.”

During her presentation, with several hundred in attendance, Petersen discussed the meaning of health and how we measure our health.

Petersen read the World Health Organization’s definition of health: “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

The definition of health has evolved, she said. People no longer simply think about life expectancy, but rather quality of life.

“Health as well-being is a different kind of way to think about health,” she added.

Although there are many ways to measure health, Petersen said the best way is to simply ask someone to rate their own health.

How a person feels about their health, she said, is best predictive of their future.

Going through the leading causes of death in the U.S., Petersen said most have not changed. Heart disease is No. 1, cancer No. 2 and stroke No. 3.

What’s more interesting, she said, is looking at the leading triggers of those causes, which include tobacco use as the No. 1 cause, poor diet and physical inactivity as No. 2 and alcohol and drug use rounding out the top three.

By looking at the causes of the causes of death, Petersen said residents will begin to look at health in a different way.

Add in the top causes of health – biology and genetics, individual behaviors, and health care and health services – and it is clear, she said, that it is up to each individual, and his or her community, to be proactive about their health.

In fact, one of every two cases of poor health is triggered by a person’s behavior, according to Petersen. She added that a person’s environment is labeled as the cause in 20 percent of cases, and 10 percent of the time a person’s lack of access to, or failure to seek out health care is the cause.

“(It’s about) the choices we make,” she said.

Although residents have to be their own health advocates, Petersen said it also is important to have access to such things as health care, affordable fruits and vegetables, and preventive services.

It also is important, she said, to utilize those services.

“It is extremely important that you participate in your own health and your own health care,” she said.

One way USF Health and The Villages are hoping to help residents and the community evaluate their health is through a public health assessment.

The community’s 84,000 residents will have the opportunity to express their health strengths, questions and concerns during numerous sessions including the monthly lecture series, town hall meetings and informal and formal conversations with USF staff.

“All of these are ways that we begin to understand what you care about and what your health means to you,” Petersen said.

In addition to taking part in the assessment, Petersen left residents with a few tips on what they can do, including rating their own health, committing to making a difference, receiving preventive services, staying involved in your life, receiving pneumonia and flu shots, and exercising.

“Your community is only as healthy as everyone in it,” she said.

Tuesday’s lecture was one of many programs and events that will be held in The Villages as a result of a recent partnership between the university and the community to make The Villages “America’s Healthiest Hometown.”