

## Choose health: Lansing rally touts benefits of better eating, exercise

Hey Lansing, it's time to put down the cigarettes, pick up the pace and swap those cupcakes for carrots.

In other words, it's time to choose health.

That was the message Tuesday night at a rally sponsored by the Capital Area Health Alliance, a consortium of public, private and medical agencies.

The Choosing Health! rally at the Union Missionary Baptist Church in Lansing drew more than 200 people who browsed informational booths, tasted healthy foods from local restaurants and caterers, and listened to presentations by health and wellness experts.

The goal, according to Executive Director Valerie Glesnes-Anderson, was to link people with resources to make lifestyle changes that lead to long, healthy lives - including eating right, exercising more and quitting tobacco and alcohol abuse.

"There are programs all over that are just amazing," she said. "We don't need to create new programs. We need to leverage the existing ones ... to be seen and used and accessed."

The event began with a speech by Olga Dazzo, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health, who shared her own story of losing weight since taking over the department in January.

"I was obese for a long time," Dazzo told the crowd. "Now, several months later, I have lost 35 pounds. It's the right thing to do to choose health. It's hard, but if I did it, I know you can do it."

The Health Alliance hopes the year-round campaign will help turn the tide on several startling statistics that show Mid-Michigan residents are leading unhealthy lives, said Glesnes-Anderson.

Nearly 22 percent of Lansing-area residents are smokers, according to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 27 percent of people between the ages of 25 and 34 are binge drinkers, and more than 55 percent of residents are overweight or obese.

"We want to create a culture of health," Glesnes-Anderson said. "Our goal is to have people react differently to the way they live, eat and move. We're not saying it's easy. So how do you move forward? You move forward with the resources that can help you."

