



## **Healthier Choices in Visalia Community Centers**

VISALIA, Aug. 23, 2011 — Community centers are great places to get together and, in Visalia, they're now healthier places to grab a quick snack or beverage, too.

The Visalia Parks and Recreation Department has established a Beverage and Healthy Snack Standard for vending machines at its four community centers. The standards call for at least half of the drinks and snacks inside vending machines to meet certain nutrition standards. The new standards are an effort to help improve health and prevent type 2 diabetes, becoming overweight and obesity.

"People deserve increased access to healthier foods and beverages. That's ultimately why we're improving the selection in the vending machines," said Visalia Parks and Recreation Supervisor John Bradley. "We are pleased to provide our residents who visit our community centers with healthier choices."

Sugary beverages are a staple of vending machines across the country. Adults and children who drink one or more sugary drinks a day are more likely to become overweight or obese. According to a study, *Bubbling Over: Soda Consumption and its Link to Obesity in California*, Tulare County has the third highest adolescent soda consumption rate in the state with over 71 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds drinking one or more sodas per day. Reducing the number of sugary beverages a person drinks can lead to weight loss and improved health. Sugary drinks include sodas, fruit drinks, sport drinks, energy drinks and sweetened teas and coffees.

The new Beverage and Healthy Snack Standards call for half of the vending machine offerings in the Department's community centers to include plain bottled water without additives like sweeteners and caffeine; fruit or vegetable juice with at least 50% juice and no added sweeteners; and unsweetened coffee or tea.

For vending snacks, at least 50% of offerings must meet the new standards, which limit individually packaged items to no more than 250 calories and set guidelines for calories

from fat and sugar. Nuts, seeds, cheese, and fruits and vegetables, are generally exempted as long as they don't contain added sugars and fat.

Additionally, recreation programs will provide healthy snacks for participants at programs such as after school programs and camps. Community special events will be recommended to provide at least 50% healthy options for event participants. A full list of guidelines under the Department's Beverage and Healthy Snack Standards are available at [www.liveandplayvisalia.com](http://www.liveandplayvisalia.com).

The department's four community centers in Visalia are the Anthony Community Center, 345 N. Jacob Street; Manuel F. Hernandez Community Center, 247 W. Ferguson Ave.; Visalia Senior Center, 310 N. Locust St.; and the Whitendale Community Center, 630 W. Beech Ave.

In addition to the four community centers, the Visalia Parks and Recreation Department oversees nearly 40 City parks, Visalia's urban forest and a wide menu of programs, activities, and special events designed for all ages of the community.

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