

September 20, 2012

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Three words help to distinguish southwest Florida from everywhere else—*quality of life*. One reason ours is a continually improving quality of life: We are blessed to have community members who care. That was very much in evidence last week at a meeting of the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce “2012 Board Advance,” attended by a record 140 leaders and led by Chairman of the Chamber Board Michael Wynn.

At the meeting, we discussed among other topics the factors that contribute to quality of life, which shouldn't be confused with the concept of *standard of living*, which is based primarily on income. Quality of life encompasses far more than money. For example:

- **Built environment.** We are fortunate to live in an extraordinarily comfortable environment. Our entire area is relatively young with robust support services and infrastructure. This is a real strength.
- **Employment.** Collier County depends on hospitality, tourism, real estate, and growth by retirement. Another significant and growing employment factor in our community is healthcare.
- **Physical health.** Collier has been one of the healthiest of Florida's 67 counties for years; the healthiest in 2010 and 2011 and fourth healthiest in 2012. Collier's “*Sustaining Excellence*” initiative, led by Dr. Joan Colfer with over 100 community leaders, is addressing such crucial health issues as morbidity, mortality, poor physical and mental health days, low birth weight, adult smoking, obesity, excessive drinking, motor vehicle crash deaths, sexually transmitted infections, teen birth rate, and more.
- **Mental health.** Collier's “*Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*” has shown year-to-year improvement, according to data from the University of Wisconsin. The bedrock of any community's overall health is its public school system. Ours, which depends on inclusiveness, is doing well.
- **Recreation and leisure time.** Our climate is unmatched, allowing year-round outdoor exercise; beautiful, safe, and abundant parks; music, drama, art centers, and museums. We have it all.
- **Social belonging.** We are known to be a welcoming place, and to have a community culture that emphasizes helping others. Feelings of mutual compatibility, selflessness, and altruism distinguish us.
- **Wealth.** Collier has a “dumbbell” shaped overall net worth. For example, many coastal families possess a high net worth and, at the same time, more than 50% of children attending public school receive free or reduced-cost lunches.

The quality of life discussion culminated with three suggestions to promote Collier's exceptional status:

- *First, brand our community.* One idea, “*This is My Community,*” would be a measure of public pride.
- *Second, focus on diversity.* In order to recognize our strengths, to address our weaknesses, and to continuously improve.
- *Third, civic responsibility.* We're all in this together and must work for continuous improvement.

Ours is a wonderful community, with a quality of life that will continue to thrive, grow and prosper, just as long as each one of us continues to care.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.