

Program: CORNER STORES

Not Just Making Money...

Looking for Healthier Choices? Don't See It? Then Ask For It!

Rockland County, NY, January 2008— Started four years ago, the Steps to a HealthierNY Corner Store program has taken on the task of promoting healthier choices in small markets in Rockland's culturally diverse neighborhoods. At a grassroots level of outreach, the Steps to a HealthierNY Corner Store program is affecting the shopping and eating habits of Rockland residents step-by-step. Over 50 small neighborhood markets now stock and promote fruit, vegetables, low-fat dairy and/or whole-wheat products, and have labeled over 400 items to indicate healthier choices. 100,000 residents now have access to these items within walking distance of their home. With healthier items "mixed in" with regular fast food and other convenience items, customers now have the option of making a healthier choice.

For example, a customer who might have grabbed a bagel or a donut on the way to work can now opt for an apple or other piece of fruit. Orlando Pereina, owner of Orlando's Deli in Spring Valley said: *"The kids used to come in here and grab a Hostess cupcake or a bag of chips. These days we try to influence them to get an apple or a mango. Skim milk - we used to not have it, but now they ask for it. And as long as they ask for it, we're going to carry it."*

The owner of Mi Tierra in Haverstraw said: *"I want to see my customers healthy, not just make money."* – nice sentiment, good result. Customers appreciate the consideration given by the stores, and the storeowners enjoy a higher level of service and image. In an effort to keep customers healthy, the Steps program in partnership with the Eat Well Play Hard program has offered several taste tests around the county. Most recently, the department's low-fat milk cow mascot spent several days in Haverstraw promoting low-fat milk. Commented one milk taste tester: *"Who knew?! Tastes the same - I can't tell the difference, so why not?"* All five stores that held taste tests now carry low-fat milk for the convenience and health of the over 14,000 customers that live in those neighborhoods!

Materials and information are available to Corner Store owners to help them promote the program – and empower shoppers to feel *"If I don't see it, I'm going to ask for it."* Storeowners are usually sensitive to their customer's requests and the results are a win-win for all. It is hoped that as the years go by, more stores will join the project to EVERYONE's benefit.

For more information call the Rockland County DOH at 845-364-2500
or visit the STEPS website at www.rocklandsteps.org