

# A Healthier Iowa: One Community at a Time

## ‘Sisterhood of the Traveling Red Dress’ promotes heart health

Eight red dresses made a week-long journey to educate women in Southwest Iowa about heart health in February. During National Women’s Heart Week February 1–7, the “Sisterhood of the Traveling Red Dress” promoted women’s heart health in Fremont, Montgomery, Page, and Taylor Counties.

The Sisterhood’s creators Judy Boye and Susan Parrott of Free People from Tobacco, the tobacco use prevention group housed at Page County Public Health, found the event a huge hit with local partners. The concept was simple. Create a display highlighting the risk factors for heart disease to accompany a red dress, which is the symbol for The Heart Truth, a national campaign for women’s heart health. Then watch the dress travel from storefront to waiting room to school and see it spread the news.

“It seemed everyone they approached thought the promotion was a great way to tell women to take care of themselves,” said Page County Public Health Administrator Belinda DeBolt. “It proved to be a fun, innovative approach to health education that was supported by communities in all four counties.”

Community partners for the “Sisterhood” included pharmacies, grocery stores, daycares, preschools, a bank, hospitals, physicians, dentists, a local YMCA, local industry, women’s clothing stores, consignment shops, public libraries, schools, and one courthouse. A red dress displayed information at a scrapbook festival and at high school basketball games.

At the Friday night Fremont-Mills game, Family Career and Community Leaders of America students made heart-shaped cookies and handed out information. The same night, Lenox students made posters and handed out heart health materials. These students prepared a slide-show, which they showed during half-time of the ball game. The Lenox school nurse also administered blood pressure checks during the basketball game.



*One of eight “traveling” red dresses hangs in the display window at Pella Corporation in Shenandoah.*

One of the other creative approaches came from Shenandoah Middle School students who produced a program on the red dress and its travels in Shenandoah. They built their docudrama around the 1987 movie “Mannequin.” A female student would magically transform into the red dress mannequin and tell the heart health story as she journeyed around town.

“We were very pleased with the response of both participants and the general public,” said DeBolt. “Agencies in neighboring counties also asked to use the idea, which was a great compliment to Judy and Susan. We hope it went as well for them as it did for us and encourage other groups to contact us to continue the event in their areas next year.”

Prevent  
Epidemics & the  
Spread of Disease

Promote  
Healthy  
Behaviors

Prepare for,  
Respond to, &  
Recover from PH  
Emergencies

Prevent injuries

Strengthen the  
Public Health  
Infrastructure

Protect Against  
Environmental  
Hazards