

HEALTHY CONNECTIONS

EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY ONE "BODY" AT A TIME

Wellness Program of the African People's Education & Defense Fund, Inc. March 2005
1327 Dr. ML King (9th) Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33705 (727) 821-2437 www.apedf.org

APEDF Fights for Economic Development

The African People's Education & Defense Fund (APEDF) will soon celebrate the fourth anniversary of our All People's TyRon Lewis Community Gym and Wellness Program. The mission of APEDF is to address the grave disparities in health, healthcare, education and economic development faced by the African community, and to defend the civil and human rights of the African community.

You may have seen or heard news reports these last few weeks about APEDF going before St. Petersburg City Council to get approval for changes to a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) contract for our Wellness Program made five years ago.

A few of these reports were negative and some disseminated completely false and malicious "disinformation," stating that we were in default on the contract, financially troubled, unsuccessful, etc. One article simply gave a platform to several City Council members who were extremely antagonistic at the meeting because they oppose our work to defend the civil and human rights of the African community.

For the Record...

The APEDF Wellness Program has been a model of success in transforming the community, with tremendous accomplishments that have greatly impacted the health and well-being of the community.

We have served over 1,200 people in the first three years, averaging 87% from low- and moderate-income households. With gym membership on a sliding fee scale or free to those who qualify, free monthly health education seminars, free monthly Healthy Connections newsletter, and free annual health fairs and weightlifting exhibitions, APEDF Wellness Program has proved to be a popular, valuable asset to the community as the only black-owned, community-based and run nonprofit institution of its kind.

APEDF has fulfilled or exceeded most of the contract goals for the CDBG – the purpose of which is "to improve the social and economic welfare of our citizens through provision of services to low- and moderate-income persons."

It is revealing that APEDF's relatively routine request for minor, non-monetary revisions to our contract was met with such hostility by the City government and media, on the same day that the City approved a huge contract change to give \$1 million in debt relief to the struggling Great Explorations Museum. The City has also recently changed other large contracts which include forgiving \$1 million in unpaid rent to the City from the FL International Museum.

The Real Issues

At the heart of our request for changes are underlying critical issues that seriously impact the future of St. Petersburg and cities throughout the country:

- Continued lack of access to CDBG funds by smaller, community-based nonprofits;
- The disturbing trend of displacement of low and moderate income people from "Midtown" [or any inner city African/impoverished communities now wanted by developers for gentrification]; and
- The refusal of the City to implement true economic development that is defined by community ownership and control of the economy, property, profits and development.

It is these issues that the media, some in the city government, and others want to deflect with their vicious attacks on the African community and organizations such as APEDF as we justly call for economic development and shared prosperity for the African community.

We invite all honest people who believe in economic development and social justice for the African community to participate in, support and defend the work of APEDF. We encourage you to view our website www.apedf.org where photos and information on the Wellness Program and other APEDF work can be found, along with back issues of the Healthy Connections newsletter. Call us at 727-821-2437.

The Struggle for Community Development Block Grant Funds to Benefit Our Communities

CDBG are federal funds from HUD (Housing & Urban

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Black Stress is Bad for Your Health

By Cassandra Floyd,
APEDF Wellness Program

Think about how you feel when you get the blue notice that your electric service will be terminated if payment isn't received by noon tomorrow! Or better yet, think about how you would feel if a police officer pulled you over for no apparent reason; all your information is in order, yet there is still a sense of panic. Remember the time you were going to Burdines, and the girl behind the counter doesn't attempt to help you, but instead stares and then makes a call, all the time looking at you. "Man, all I wanted to do was buy a nice shirt!" you think to yourself.

Stress is Deadly

Anything from sweating a late check in the mail, to the boss who you obviously can't please or get off your back, can invoke feelings of rage, hopelessness, anxiety, or a host of other DEADLY emotions! Yes, deadly!

We as Africans in the US die, on average, a whole seven years sooner than white people. For African men, the number is an astonishing 11 years sooner than white men.

African people in the US suffer extremely disproportionate death rates of all seven major killers in the country:

- Heart disease 38% higher for blacks
- Cancer 32% higher
- Stroke 82% higher
- Liver disease 77% higher
- Infant mortality 33% higher
- Diabetes 132% higher
- Respiratory disease
- Kidney disease 176% higher

** statistics from National Center for Health*

All of these killers are either directly or indirectly related to stress. More black men die from heart attacks associated with stress than any other ethnic group in the US. Only black women over the age of 55 are second in their likelihood of dying from a stress-related heart attack. It is important to mention that African people living in the US suffer the highest rates of hypertension and death from heart attacks and stroke in the entire world!

Information is the key to overturning these conditions that plague our entire community. We have to have a stake in our health if we want to see our children and grandchildren grow to ripe age. The African People's Education and Defense Fund wants to give you the education you need to defend yourself and your family against these and other treacherous diseases.

Risk Factors

The first thing we need to look at is the risk factors most likely to cause illness or death in African people living in the US: Obesity, smoking, drinking, drug use, fatty diet (high in saturated fat and cholesterol), lack of physical exercise, STRESS, salt, untreated high blood pressure, and uncontrolled diabetes.

These are called our "controllable" risk factors — the ones we may be able to do something about. It is important to know that just one of these risk factors can wreak havoc on a black person's health, and two or more is surely

signing a death warrant!

Although stress is considered a factor outside the other factors, stress can be the underlying cause of **all** of the other risk factors. Consider this: the hormone cortisol, which is released in stressful situations, is now known to be a major cause of obesity and the difficulty of losing weight; most addictions (drug use, smoking, alcohol use, and food addictions) are a response to, or really a way to cope with stressful situations; the development of high blood pressure is directly linked to how the body responds to stress, and diabetes and high blood pressure usually go hand-in-hand.

It is now a known fact that physical activity is the single best way to deal with stress. There is nothing better than exercise to balance out what stress can do to your body.

What is Black Stress and How is it Different?

Generally, black stress is the hassle of being black in America! More specifically, research has proven that the effects of stressful events are cumulative, and that if there is a constant collection of stressful events, it may leave some people especially vulnerable to illness and disease.

In several studies done in the late 1960s clearly linking

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Ordinary life for a black man or woman living in America produces a steady, suppressed anger that many scientists believe is the reason for the explosive rate of hypertension among our people.

All People's TyRon Lewis Community Gym Guide to Great Fitness



1327 - 9th Street So.
St. Petersburg
824-5670

Why Cardio Fitness Training?

By Damon Reio, Manager

All People's TyRon Lewis Community Gym

We encourage everyone to participate in an aerobics program because of the impressive health and physical benefits that result.

Cardiovascular fitness is important because it helps our bodies to utilize oxygen better, which is necessary in blood circulation and our ability to take in air better. Cardiovascular fitness is also key in preventing many health complications such as diabetes, osteoporosis, muscle atrophy and high cholesterol.



In addition cardiovascular fitness prevents obesity because the exercise requires fat to be metabolized as energy in order to perform the exercise, thus fat is constantly burned. On the next page are recommended guidelines for cardio exercise to achieve the above benefits. You are guaranteed to achieve these results by joining the aerobics classes at the APEDF Wellness Center / All People's TyRon Lewis Community Gym!

(continued next page)

Fitness Tidbit: Overload to Pump Up Your Training!

Most people think you can continuously achieve results without changing your workout program. Unfortunately, after working out for months and years with the same, monotonous exercise program, many people become very discouraged and may quit altogether. If you find yourself in this situation I highly recommend this principle — the principle of over loading.

To achieve training improvements or another desired effect, the relevant body system must be over loaded beyond its normal capacity. When the body is stressed in this manner, it responds by adapting so that its capacity increases.

The physiological changes that occur in the body as a result of the exercise overload are referred to as a "training effect." A training effect will occur if the exercise is sufficient: how often you perform the exercise per week, the intensity level, the duration, and the type of exercise. Overloading applies to all types of physical conditioning such as strength training, cardiovascular exercise, and flexibility training. Fitness programs that lack this principle may maintain, but will not improve, one's level of fitness.

APEDF Wellness Program Free Aerobics Classes

**Tuesdays, Thursdays
& Fridays**

6:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Saturdays 11:00 am - noon

Sign Up Now!

Call 727-824-5670 or stop by:

TyRon Lewis Community Gym

1327 Dr. ML King Jr. Street So., St. Pete



Why Cardio Training? (Continued from previous page)

The following are recommended guidelines for performing cardio exercise.

1. Frequency:

- 3 to 5 days per week. Individuals who are new to a cardio exercise program should begin with 3 workouts per week and add additional workouts only after adaptation to the current program has occurred.

2. Intensity:

- 55% to 90% of your maximum heart rate (220 minus your age). Individuals who are healthy but not in condition should start on the lower end of the maximum heart rate.

3. Duration:

- 20 minutes to 60 minutes of continuous or interval activity. Individuals not conditioned may accumulate the minutes of activity and/or insert rest periods.

4. Type of activity

- Any type of exercise that is cardiovascular in nature such as walking, hiking, jogging, cycling, skating, stepping, or aerobics is sufficient.

**JOIN THE ALL PEOPLE'S TYRON LEWIS COMMUNITY GYM
AEROBICS CLASSES!**

Lower Your Risk of Disease and Death: Become More Active Today!

The 1996 *US Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health* was a call to people living in the US to become active. This report states that by becoming more active, Americans can lower their risk of premature death, and the development of chronic illness, such as heart disease, chronic, illness, and diabetes. Among its major findings were the following points.

- People who are usually inactive can improve their health by becoming moderately active on a regular basis.
- Physical activity does not need to be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Enhanced fitness or physiological changes occur when the amount of activity is increased.

However, as the amount increases so does the risk of injury and noncompliance.

Here are their guidelines to become more active:

- Get 30 minutes of moderate activity on most, if not all, days of the week.
- The 30 minutes of activity may be accumulated throughout the day.
- A moderate amount of physical activity uses approximately 150 calories per day or 1000 calories per week.
- Examples of moderate physical activity are raking, gardening, or walking at a pace of 15 minutes per mile.
- The less vigorous the activity, the more time is needed to achieve health benefits.

Source: *Fitness: Theory and Practice*, Laura A Gladwin, MS, pg. 4

Black Stress, Continued from Page 2

stress and disease, doctors learned that many widows and widowers die soon after the death of a spouse, and that divorced people are twelve times more likely to become ill with a major disease after a divorce. Now, these are not reoccurring events in the average person's life. On average, for a person with control over basic events in their life, there are ebbs and flows of stressful situations, giving the body time to recuperate.

Ordinary life for a black man or woman living in America produces a steady, suppressed anger that many scientists believe is the reason for the explosive rate of hypertension among our people. According to Barbara M. Dixon, R.D., L.D.N., in her book "Good Health for African Americans," people who have the most control over their lives experience the least stress.

It is the lack of economic control over our lives and community that renders us disproportionately ill and dead of curable disease. It's not just "racism" — enduring a racial slur, a cab passing you by, or the racist clerk at Burdines is a display of a lack of control of your life that contributes to your steady high levels of toxic stress. And our conditioning as African people to suppress our anger towards society adds more stress!

It is vitally important to understand the root of our stress as the lack of economic and political control over our lives and communities. Without being able to respond to the stress in your life, it will manifest itself in the forms of cancerous tumors in your body, heart attacks, stroke, addictions, etc.

The key is responding positively to stress in your life. Our usual response is escape, diversion, or turning it against ourselves: food, alcohol, cigarettes, TV, or no response (which can be just as deadly). Some suggestions made in the book *Good Health for African Americans* are activities such as breathing exercises, a healthy diet, music, exercise, yoga, and talking it out. I often use a punching bag, dance in my living room, play with my kid, or laugh out loud.

Another thing that you can do is to participate in organizations that work to change the social and economic conditions; to get the ability to determine our lives and future through economic and political control. The African Peoples Education and Defense Fund is one of those organizations! Join the APEDF Wellness Program or our other work for economic development and social justice. Call 727-821-2437.

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Open to anyone, with annual weight lifting exhibition and participation in regional contests. Several of our members have won awards and broken state records.



APEDF Fights for Economic Development, Continued from Page 1

Development) which are given to cities based on income and unemployment statistics that come primarily from African and other impoverished communities in the name of eliminating poverty and blight. CDBG funds have historically been used for projects that benefit white developers and corporations – in St. Petersburg they were granted to build the Hilton Hotel, to demolish Laurel Park public housing to make a parking lot for the Dome, and even taken by the City to pay their own salaries and administrative costs and to purchase land for their development projects.

This small grant—a tiny portion of the around \$5 million given to St. Petersburg every year—provided only for renovation of an abandoned building that had become a community eyesore, and funds to purchase fitness equipment. APEDF funds all the Wellness Program expenses including the monthly newsletter, monthly health seminars, health fairs, and daily operations at the gym.

APEDF struggled fiercely and won approval for CDBG funds in 2000 to pave the way for other community-based and run nonprofits to use the people's tax money to go back into to the communities it came from and is intended for. In the grant approval and contract negotiation process, APEDF exposed the City's CDBG approval criteria which excludes smaller, community-based nonprofits and is above and beyond the requirements of HUD for these funds.

No one should forget that the City made special demands on APEDF not required of other groups, and even tried to put an illegal, unconstitutional “designer rule” in our contract to restrict our freedom of speech -- this outrageous clause was voided only after pressure from a prominent First Amendment rights attorney.

The City made another unprecedented move to impose their will by putting in our contract the rules for what we could name our facility. Their designer rule precluded the former “Uhuru's Black Gym of Our Own” that showed proud ownership of a community-based and run institution that benefits the African community which suffers disproportionately from life-threatening but often preventable health conditions and diseases.

We named the fitness center after TyRon Lewis because it symbolizes the challenge for economic development and social justice — to change the oppressive conditions that thousands of African community face; for the young people who are too likely to find themselves faced with the same threats and choices as TyRon Lewis in his short life.

After us, the City was forced to revise and standardize criteria for awarding CDBG funds. However, the City used this opportunity to actually make it *harder* for small nonprofits to get funding, and many criteria are still way above and beyond what is required by HUD, including long term liens on an agency's property, annual audits for any amount of funds received, architectural plans to be completed before application for funding, and more.

One of the contract revisions we recently requested was that the required audits be submitted every 3 years rather than annually. City Council members and staff mentioned that other nonprofit organizations have also said this is an undue financial burden, and some small nonprofits have refused to accept grants because of this. These expensive, specialized government audits are not required by HUD or many other cities.

As a result, we still see CDBG money going repeatedly to large nonprofit social service agencies, which are not run by the communities they serve. They benefit and make their careers from the continuing poverty, misery and dependency of our communities, rather than working to end the oppressive conditions that could actually make their agencies unnecessary.

Gentrification of “Midtown” St. Petersburg – Dispersal and Impoverishment of the African community

On our CDBG application, we projected goals of 85% of people served each year to be low to moderate income (HUD requires 51%), and projected that 90% would live within the “Challenge Area” boundaries that the City drew as a priority focus area. (The City renamed us “Target Area” and then “Midtown.”)

In the past four years, APEDF has served an average of 87% low to moderate income persons, and an average 58% all of persons served live inside “Midtown.” We continue to do extensive outreach to vigorously promote and advertise APEDF Wellness Program services inside “Midtown.” Most of those we serve outside of “Midtown” live between 34th and 49th Streets South, or south of 30th Avenue, in zip codes 33705, 33711, and 33712. These areas are largely low/moderate income, with studies showing these zips have the highest incidences of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and other diseases which can be positively impacted by fitness services.

Since the main purpose of CDBG is provide services to low- and moderate-income persons, we suggested that the City broaden the artificial borders they created for “Midtown,” as they already have for the Free Enterprise Zone, or lower the “Midtown” percentage.

We have also found disturbing trends that each year reduce the percentage of those we serve who live in “Midtown.” APEDF is finding that many low- and moderate-income residents of the City can no longer find affordable housing in Midtown. Rental prices are soaring; property prices and taxes have increased; property owners are being cited for codes violations with no renovation assistance offered by the City, and are often preyed on by unscrupulous contractors whose “repairs” do not meet code. Many people are forced into foreclosure or sale to investors who turn over properties for high profit. Housing Authorities are reducing or selling off public housing such as Jordan Park and Graham-Rogall. This is part of a national trend of gentrification, which is further impoverishing and dispersing our communities and support networks.

Expanding Our Fitness Services

Another contract change we requested was to expand the fitness services in place of the Healthy Groceries store. We will use the space for free aerobics classes made possible by a grant from the Allegheny Franciscan Foundation of Tampa Bay. Many vitamins, supplements, power bars and health beverages now continue to be sold at the gym, and we continue to promote healthy diets and give nutritional information through the gym, seminars, and newsletter.

To be viable, Healthy Groceries needed a larger space, more equipment and capital, more buying power for more variety and lower prices, and overall economic development which would allow more people in the community to afford fresh and healthy foods.

True Economic Development is Needed for African Community

All these issues point to the need for true economic development in the African community. Economic development means ownership and control of the economy, property, profits, and development. A real commitment to fixing our city requires a comprehensive approach that includes a massive infusion of capital for a total transformation of the African community.

There are many possibilities that would grow an economic capacity from within that would create African-owned businesses and job opportunities for everyone. This would benefit the entire African community and have a positive impact on the economy and image of our entire city. APEDF continues to build economic institutions to improve the lives and well-being of the African community, and continues to define and struggle for real economic development through APEDF Town Hall or City Council meetings and media.

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THE BENEFITS OF AEROBIC EXERCISE

Free Introductory Seminar

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APEDF Wellness Center

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St. Petersburg, FL

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