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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Daily Leader

A new year has begun, and many have made resolutions. With the holidays in the recent past, one resolution numerous people make is to lose weight.

The Seward County K-State Extension office, along with some hosting partners, will once again be helping some to take off those holiday pounds.

Starting Monday and ending in March, the Extension will host its annual Community Meltdown, an eight-week weight loss competition focusing on implementing a healthier lifestyle in a fun team format.

From 6 to 7 p.m. each Monday at the Seward County Activity Center, participants will hear from health experts on a variety of topics, according to Extension agent Kathy Bloom.

“Susan Lukwago’s going to talk about ‘Small Steps, Big Changes,’” she said. “Mary Hibbert’s going to talk about nutrition and label reading. Sarah Foreman is going to talk about emotional eating.”

Bloom said members of Liberal High School’s Family, Career and Community Leaders of America group will also give a presentation on whole grains.

“Each week, we’re going to have different physical activities demonstrated,” she said. “People can try them out. If you find an exercise you enjoy doing, you’re more likely to do it.”

People will likewise be shown a variety of exercises they can do during each Monday presentation.

“Something different from square dancing to zumba to Strong Bodies with the group from the senior center,” Bloom said. “It’s going to be lots of different things.”

She said some of the exercises take just minutes a day.

“We’re going to have a different food group spotlighted each week and have recipes and samples of different foods that are quick and easy to fix that are good for you,” she said.

Some of the education will include information on body mass index and blood pressure, according to Bloom.

“Every time people attend a meeting, their name will be put into a drawing, and we’ll draw for a Wii the final night,” she said. “We were able to purchase that with money from the Liberal Area Coalition for Families. The first 125 people to sign up will get a pedometer at weigh-in.”

Registrations were scheduled to be due today, but with many requests to do so, the deadline has been extended.

“People who have their registration forms and money in by Monday at noon won’t need to pay the late fee, but we would appreciate them as soon as possible,” Bloom said. “It sure helps out if we get them ahead of time.”

People can form a team of four friends, co-workers and family members interested in learning more about nutrition, physical activity and weight loss.

A registration fee of \$40 per team or \$10 per individual must be paid prior to weighing in Monday. Checks need to be made payable to Seward County Extension Council.

Registration can be made by mail to Seward County Extension Office, 1081 Stadium Rd., Liberal, KS 67901 or by stopping by the Extension office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Late registrations will be accepted until 6 p.m. Monday, with an additional fee of \$20 per team.

Bloom said she is excited about what Community Meltdown does for people.

“Not only does it help you lose weight, but also just helps you learn a healthier lifestyle,” she said. “We certainly all could use that.”

Bloom said she was pleased with the results of the 2009 event, and she hopes for the same this year.

“Every year, we find new ways to make it better,” she said. “We’re trying this food group spotlight this year and also the drawing for the Wii.”

Bloom said a gradual weight loss is suggested, and she said there are concerns about losing too much weight at once.

“The best weight loss is a pound and a half or so a week,” she said. “We really don’t want to encourage too high of a weight loss because I think we all know what happens if you lose it too fast. It comes right back on. What we’re really wanting to target is lifestyle changes so you don’t

have to go and try to lose that same weight every year.”

Bloom said in addition to regular exercise, food journals will be given to participants.

“They’re really a unique little system that we’ve developed this year,” she said. “It’s for them to help keep track of what they eat and what they need to include in their diet. They’ll have that, and we just really encourage physical activity.”

At Monday’s weigh in, people can have body mass index and blood pressures taken, and Bloom said this year, two dieticians will be on hand for a question and answer period.

“As in years past, (participants) get three free passes to both the Wellness Center at the college and Southwest Fitness and Racquetball,” she said. “There will be groups Monday night that are doing different classes from those organizations.”

Bloom said everyone has in mind to get back on track after the holidays, and Community Meltdown helps with weight loss resolutions.

“They make those resolutions either to lose weight or have a healthier lifestyle,” she said. “We like to help out with that.”

Cash prizes will be awarded to the teams losing the most weight, including \$200 for first place, \$100 for second and \$50 for third. Those will be awarded at the weigh-out on March 1.

Bloom said there are no specific goals for how much weight to lose, but she said people should set a target of losing 10 percent of their body mass, and not necessarily pounds.

“That can make a significant impact in your health,” she said.

The competition will be based on pounds, however.

Bloom said if someone does not have four people to make up a team, there are people available to help form a team.

“We’re glad to do that if you can’t round up three friends to do it with you,” she said.

For more information about Community Meltdown, contact the Seward County Extension office at 624-5604, by e-mail at sw@ksre.ksu.edu or at www.seward.ksu.edu.

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