

Low-income fitness program skips east-end

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By Patricia Loneragan
orleansstar@transcontinental.ca

The city's Woman Alive program, an initiative that provides low-income women an affordable opportunity to get fit and enjoy the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, sidestepped the east-end.

A press release issued by the city lists the nine locations the program is available, none of which are located in Ottawa's east end. The program is offered only at facilities in the central, west and south ends of the city. Facilities east of Blair are conspicuously absent from the list.

According to the release sent by the city, exercise and proper diet sets a strong foundation for women to help prevent chronic diseases like high blood pressure and heart disease so they can lead longer, healthier lives. However, many fitness and wellness programs come with a price tag that low-income women cannot afford.

Under the Woman Alive, which is in its 13th year, participants can get fit, learn about healthy choices and meet new people for a one dollar contribution to each class.

"Good health is a priceless benefit that everyone should enjoy," the release states.

That the program is not available in an east-end facility is concerning, said Orléans Coun. Bob Monette. He indicated there are women in need in the east as there are in other parts of the city.

"Yes, it's an affluent community, but there are people in need," Monette continued. "I'm surprised the east was not represented."

In an e-mail to Monette, the city's general manager for parks, recreation and cultural services Dan Chenier explained the program is funded through the province's Ministry of Health's Partners in Health initiative.

"The program started in the core of the city in neighbourhoods where there are significant unmet needs and where participants cannot afford access fee(s)," Chenier wrote.

The program has expanded to other high need neighbourhoods over the years, he continued. The expansion has often been a response to requests from patrons at one of the facilities or social agencies in the area, Chenier said.

With funding due to run out this month, park, recreation and culture as well as public health are

working together to find new sources of funding, he continued.

"As part of our work, we will determine if funding for this type of programming can be secured for an east end location," Chenier said.

Meanwhile, Monette indicated if the program continues he'll ensure the east-end is represented.

"It should be represented all the time," he said.