

## Mayor's Fitness Council: Building a Healthy SA



**By Tony Canty, Chair, Mayor's Fitness Council and CIO/CFO Labatt Food Service**

By now, almost everyone has heard the alarming health statistics in San Antonio. 67% of all adults are obese or overweight; 30% of children have an unhealthy weight. This epidemic, left unaddressed, is going to result in a dramatic increase in occurrences of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and other maladies and will negatively impact the future prosperity of our great city. As outlined in the SA2020 community vision, health and fitness is one of our city's top priority areas. Mayor Julian Castro has made improving health one of the primary policy objectives for his administration and has tasked the Mayor's Fitness Council (MFC) to take the lead in reducing obesity in the city.

The MFC was formed in May 2010 with the assistance of an \$85,000 grant focused on obesity reduction from the state of Texas. Made up of over thirty well recognized business leaders, health professionals, school superintendents and other champions of health and wellness in San Antonio, the grant had specific project deliverables. They included hosting two healthy school summits, developing a neighborhood walking group leadership training program, creating a web site ([www.sabalance.org](http://www.sabalance.org)) on health and fitness, and building four community gardens. These projects were all completed by mid-2011.

While the MFC was working on these

objectives, a strategic alliance was formed with San Antonio's health department, Metro Health. This proved to be a timely move, as the City of San Antonio had been awarded a significant grant from the Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) initiative. This \$15.6 million stimulus award was the third largest of its kind in the country and was focused entirely on obesity reduction. In addition to many environmental initiatives, such as safe streets for walking and bicycling, the funding also included a variety of activities to improve access to resources for physical activity and nutritious foods, such as, installing fitness stations and walking trails for public use, free physical activity classes in parks, health assessment stations in libraries, healthy food options in restaurants, neighborhood markets, and community centers, PE equipment and salad bars in schools, and community-wide Siclovia events, among others. Combining these resources with the efforts of the MFC helped to avoid duplication of efforts and provided both structure and momentum.

In August 2011, as the state grant came to a close, a sustainability summit was held to plan the future role of the MFC. Several Metro Health partnerships, including the Active Living Council, the Worksite Wellness Task Force and the Food Policy Council were invited to attend. Here,

a plan was put in place to keep all of the groups active and independent but also to combine their efforts with the MFC for a common cause. Additionally, Metro Health is now planning to use the MFC as its leadership council for all future grant opportunities related to obesity prevention. A new MFC executive committee has been formed and several new community leaders have been added to the MFC for a two year appointment. The Mayor's Fitness Council has a new strategic plan with priorities to convene key leadership, promote access, equity, and awareness of opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating and support policies that advance nutrition and physical activity.

The obesity problem in San Antonio did not happen overnight, and the lifestyle changes necessary to correct this problem will also take several years. Programs in the workplace, schools, neighborhoods and community venues, will be needed to move the needle if San Antonio as a whole is to become a healthier city. The MFC has positioned its efforts to work in all these areas, to initiate programs and to hand them off to other great existing organizations, such as the YMCA, San Antonio Sports, San Antonio Food Bank, and many other local stakeholders in wellness, as we all work together with the goal of making San Antonio one of the fittest cities in the nation.



**MFC Executive Committee (left to right): Jeff Skelton, Liset Leal-Vasquez, Robert Maggiani, Amelie Ramirez, Dr. Jennifer Shaw, Dr. Annette Zaharoff, Eric Cooper, Mary Ullmann Japhet (Vice-Chair), Tony Canty (Chair), Dr. Peter Wald, Frances Gonzalez, Darryl Byrd, Luis Patino, Dr. Stacey Johnson, Dr. Thomas Schlenker, Kate Rogers (not pictured: Dr. Robert Ferrer, Sandy Morander and Xavier Urrutia)**