

*In Rockford Register Star*

# Rockford Projects Healthy Global Image with CHIP

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**“Rockford is becoming the home-base of an international health movement.”**

THE ROCK RIVER VALLEY is being marketed around the world as a region undergoing a health transformation.

Growing local popularity of the Coronary Health Improvement Project, known as CHIP, is catching the attention of health conscious people in other parts of the world.

## Summer 2002 Conference

Last summer, world-renowned health experts gave their take on the state of U.S. nutrition to local leaders. The audience came from all walks of life: medical workers, educators, and heads of major corporations. And the hope was that they would take these nuggets of knowledge back to their friends, patients, and co-workers to improve the health and lifestyles of 10 to 20% of the community.

Conference speakers were handpicked to spark that effort. Their insights into lifestyle medicine—changes to diet and exercise instead of dependence on drugs and surgery—were geared toward lowering the rate of some diseases and improving the quality of life for Rockfordians.

“We think of protein as nearly god-like,” said T. Colin Campbell, professor of nutrition at Cornell University and a former dairy farmer who now promotes a vegetarian diet. “I say, that’s nonsense.”

Despite his background, Dr. Campbell preaches a diet that minimizes meat and dairy products. It’s because some of his best-known research, called “The China Project,” found that the Chinese had lower levels of many diseases largely because of their simpler, plant-based diet.

For instance, every second American death certifi-

cate is stamped “Heart Disease.” Yet, this Western killer disease is virtually absent and non-existent in China.

That is not to say that CHIP leaders will force a vegetarian diet on everyone in Rockford, but they want to improve the health of thousands of residents. “Our intention is not to change people’s minds,” Vedro said, “it’s to expose people to scientific information alternatives so that they can choose wisely.”

## Visitors From Abroad

During November, CHIP organizers hosted visits from people living in India and Australia.

“The awareness of CHIP in Rockford is so striking,” Sheila Krishnaswamy, a nutritionist from India, said during her visit last week. “If Rockford can take health to such great heights, it can work in other cities as well.”

CHIP participants learn to make lifestyle and diet adjustments that can prevent and reverse obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease. The program is offered to schools, churches, businesses and hospitals in the Rock River Valley. Participants attend 16 sessions at a cost of \$395 per person. CHIP-approved meals are available at 26 restaurants. Since its Rockford inception in 1999, CHIP has graduated 4,500 participants.

During the next year, Krishnaswamy hopes to attract more interest in CHIP, which began in India 13 years ago when Dr. Diehl conducted the program in Bangalore attended by more than 1,000 millionaires at high risk for coronary disease due to their Westernized lifestyle and eating patterns.

The traditional Indian diet is healthy with no beef and an emphasis on grains, fish, and poultry. But processed foods, such as canned soup, white rice and ready-to-eat

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noodles, are also popular and often contain excess salt and may lack important nutrients.

Most people lead very mostly sedentary lives in Bangalore, a city of six million where Krishnaswamy lives. She said her community is known as the “Silicon Valley of India” for its many computer companies.

Those factors are contributing to higher rates of overweight, hypertension, adult onset diabetes and cardiovascular disease in Bangalore.

“Those kinds of diseases are on the rise because in the companies and among the younger generations we are well-exposed to the American lifestyle,” she said. “Now, it’s a mix of the Indian and Western lifestyles.”

Retired career educator Dr. Vic Gidley and his wife, Jean, are among 25 people who started a CHIP program this summer in Cairns, a city of 120,000 in Northeast Australia.

“The health statistics there parallel America,” Dr. Gidley said. “We lose about 40% of our people to heart disease. I don’t think there are a lot of cultural differences. The Australian male is more likely to watch a sport than to play a sport.”

The Gidleys want to start a CHIP program in the Sydney area in conjunction with some major hospital. “Diabetes, obesity, constipation, hypertension, and heart problems are rising. We need to turn this around.”

CHIP executive consultant, Peter Vedro, wants Rockford to serve as a global model of how a community can be transformed by adopting a healthy lifestyle and diet.

“In the last several months, we have been very diligent in sharing the impact of what we have been doing with CHIP people around the world,” he said.

A special training seminar is being planned for May of 2003. A special delegation from Singapore is expected, among others.

*\*Reprinted with permission from the Rockford Register Star, December 5, 2002 issue.*

## What’s CHIP?

CHIP is an educationally intensive lifestyle intervention program with more than 40,000 graduates worldwide. Founded and presented by Dr. Hans Diehl, and endorsed by the Physicians’ Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), both headquartered in Washington, D.C., the CHIP program focuses on markedly reducing coronary risk factor levels through the adoption of better health habits and appropriate lifestyle changes. The goal is to facilitate disease reversal by lowering blood cholesterol, triglyceride and blood sugar levels by reducing excess weight, lowering high blood pressure, enhancing daily exercise, and by eliminating smoking. Risk factor levels are carefully assessed before the educational intervention begins, immediately following the completion of the 40-hour educational program, and again after three and 12 months. The results have been published in the *American Journal of Cardiology* (1998) and the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (2002).

The CHIP program conducted in Rockford is hosted by the SwedishAmerican Health System. The goal is to graduate 7,000 residents, or 7% of the adult population, and to make Rockford the healthiest city in North America. The program is either conducted by Dr. Diehl himself as a “live” program, or conducted via a state-of-the-art video set with trained facilitators. The program is either conducted over a period of four weeks, where people meet from Monday through Thursday for two-hours for four weeks, or, they attend the CHIP program offered twice a week for eight weeks. The CHIP program is currently conducted in more than 150 cities via the video program offered through faith-based communities, through licensed CHIP leaders, or through arrangements with corporations.

CHIP is based on the foundation that, according to the U.S. Surgeon General, 75% of our Western diseases are “lifestyle-related.” They relate to our rich diet, our lack of exercise, our use of cigarettes, alcohol, and caffeine, our level of stress, and the quality of our support. The diseases include: heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, gout, arthritis, overweight, certain adult cancers, impotence, diverticular disease, constipation, heartburn, and gall bladder disease. The CHIP program is community-based, works closely with referring physicians, schools, and local restaurants, and sustains adherence to the program guidelines through an active CHIP alumni support organization.