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Designation puts focus on helping children

By Ray Finger
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To help boost support for children and families, County Executive Tom Santulli has declared August Strong Kids Safe Kids Month in Chemung County.

"This is an extremely important issue," said Santulli, who unveiled a proclamation at a news conference Tuesday.

Despite the hard work of professionals who deal with young people, the county has some of the highest rates of foster care admissions and child abuse in the state, he said.

"Nearly half of our children don't eat balanced meals at home or get sufficient exercise," he said.

Additionally, 30 percent of children starting kindergarten are nutritionally, socially and psychologically not ready for school, and 20 percent live below the poverty level, he said.

"Sometimes, we're all so busy in our everyday lives that this stuff sometimes gets forgotten," Santulli said. "We just want to make sure it's utmost in people's minds."

Those statistics can begin to change through programs such as Chemung County's Strong Kids Safe Kids Festival, he said. The 25th annual festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 22 at the Chemung County Fairgrounds.

Last year, more than 10,000 people attended the festival, said Susan Collins, co-chair of the festival with Misty Purdy. "Everything at the event is free, totally free, so families can go and spend a whole day together with their children learning and having fun ...," Collins said.

This year's attractions include horseback riding, a train, carriage rides, live music, magicians, dancers, inflatables and square dancing.

Additional Facts

Volunteers needed

Volunteers are still being sought for the Strong Kids Safe Kids Festival later this month to help with set up/tear down, food booths, cleanup and other activities.

For more information, call Carol Allard at (607) 735-3560 or 733-8563 or send e-mail to CheeryCarol@msn.com, or call Dorothy Kurta at 737-4891 or send e-mail to ELETDMK@omh.state.ny.us.
