



Photos by Kendra Gravelle

Amber Bliss, left, reference librarian at the West Warwick Public Library, is joined by Anna Ryan for a painting activity during a health fair hosted by the West Warwick Housing Authority Wednesday morning.

# Happy, healthy

WWHA hosts third annual health fair at West Warwick Manor.

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WEST WARWICK — It was all about living well Wednesday, during a health fair hosted by the West Warwick Housing Authority.

The third annual event was organized to conduct health screenings for residents and to provide them with valuable tools to support their well-being.

"One of our big goals is to engage our residents in a number of activities and to promote healthy lifestyles and socialization," said Stephen O'Rourke, executive director of the West Warwick Housing Authority.

West Warwick Manor was buzzing Wednesday morning, as residents of



West Warwick firefighters Ben Marsland and Luke Hogan, not pictured, manned a table during the event.

the housing authority's two locations mingled and checked out each of the 16 participating vendors.

Vendors from West Warwick and

beyond offered a wide range of information and services. Members of

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# Fair

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The Thundermist Smoking Cessation Program gave useful advice on cutting smoking habits; the University of Rhode Island Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education served up carrot salad samples and taught residents about eating healthy on a budget.

Other vendors included the West Warwick Senior Center, Food-on-the-Move, AARP of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, the West Warwick Fire Department and Cowsett Home Care, among sev-

eral others.

O'Rourke said that, in order to address residents' needs holistically, it was important for the event to feature a variety of services and activities.

"A lot of these people don't have the opportunity to enjoy that elsewhere," O'Rourke added.

At a table set up by the West Warwick Public Library, Amber Bliss, the library's reference librarian, led residents in a rock-painting activity.

"Social health and mental health are very important, and doing things like crafts, where you can talk to other people and just enjoy yourself, is very helpful," Bliss

said, sitting at a table strewn with brushes and makeshift paint palettes.

Across from her, Anna Ryan carefully painted strokes of pink and blue and purple onto a smooth stone.

Bliss added that painting, in particular, is a good way to improve hand-eye coordination while strengthening fine motor skills.

Nearby, representatives from Oak Street Health spoke with residents about the services it offers.

The network of health centers was founded in 2013 in Chicago, and today has more than 40 locations nationwide, with a new location opening in Warwick this summer.

"Our goal is really to help the community stay healthy, happy and living at home," said Dan Derocher, outreach director for Oak Street Health.

In addition to the obvious health benefits of Wednesday's event, O'Rourke also touted the health fair as an opportunity to build camaraderie among housing authority residents.

"Some of them don't leave the building, some of them are shy, introverted, and don't really get involved," he said. "I think when they come out with other people and interact, it makes their life a little bit better."

And although the annual health fair to this point has

been open only to residents of the housing authority, O'Rourke said he plans to open next year's event up to all West Warwick residents.

Welcoming members of the wider community would help the housing authority meet its goal of improving its image, O'Rourke said.

"Public housing was al-

ways known as sort of a separate entity — people stay away," O'Rourke said, around him residents were picking up all sorts of useful health- and wellness-related tidbits. "It's just inviting people in to say, 'we're part of the community.'"

Plus, he continued, "we not" invite everyone?