

Commissioner Sue Gunzburger *Broward County Commission, District 6*

As we turn the calendar to a new month, we are reminded that Valentine's Day is February 14th—a day set aside when friends and lovers express affection for one another. Hearts and Cupids became symbols of Valentine's Day.

While you may or may not celebrate Valentine's Day, it is likely you will encounter images of a bright, red heart this month. Accept it as a signal to keep your heart and the hearts of the ones you love in healthy, working order.

Heart disease is still the leading cause of death in the United States. Although the number of people dying from cardiovascular disease is down, the American Heart Association states that risk factors—like obesity, diabetes and smoking—are holding steady or rising.

Lifestyle, including exercise and diet, is the most important element in maintaining a healthy heart. As we begin a new year, make an appointment with your physician for a comprehensive examination. You should never embark on diets and exercise programs before consulting with a medical doctor.

While age and other medical conditions might affect your diet, virtually all medical professionals agree that better food habits can help you reduce your risk for a heart attack. A healthful eating plan means choosing the right foods and preparing them in a healthy manner.

Exercise is critical to maintaining a healthy heart. Even if you don't participate in a planned exercise program, there are some tips you could follow in your everyday routine: Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park your car at the far end of a parking lot and walk a short distance. Think of housework as exercise—vacuuming briskly can be an opportunity to exercise. Take a short walk after lunch or dinner.

In 2006, Broward County's Parks & Recreation Division launched a new fitness program, *Commit 2B Fit—It Starts in Parks*. The award-winning program offers residents an opportunity to get active, get healthy, and get rewarded by earning engraved charms and other rewards. The objective of the program is to encourage residents to visit a park at least six times a month and spend at least 30 minutes doing some form of exercise. For details on the program, stop by any Broward County park or visit www.broward.org/parks.

As always, please feel free to contact me to share your concerns and priorities-- 954-357-7006--or e-mail sgunzburger@broward.org.