



## History and Mission of the Susan P. Byrnes Health Education Center

The mission of the Susan P. Byrnes Health Education Center (Byrnes HEC) is to educate and inspire people of all ages to make healthy choices. The Byrnes HEC was the dream of Susan Byrnes, R.N., that became a reality through the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and generous community support. As an emergency department nurse, Susie knew that many of the diseases and injuries she saw in the hospital were preventable through healthy lifestyle choices. Armed with a passion for prevention, she set a goal to create a place that would inspire healthier lives.

After learning about a few Health Education Centers that had opened across the country, Susie sought to bring this innovative teaching concept home to Central Pennsylvania. To fund the project, many community volunteers and board members launched a capital campaign that raised three (3) million dollars to open the York, PA facility in 1995.

A visit to the Center is an exciting multimedia experience. Innovative programs are led by exceptionally qualified health educators and are enhanced by amazing, interactive exhibits. All programs and exhibits meet many National and State Education Standards and were designed in conjunction with local school representatives to enhance classroom curriculum.

After experiencing one of our programs, former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and Byrnes HEC Honorary Advisory Board Member explained, "You have found a way to put pizzazz into prevention!" Dr. Koop later added that the Center's mission is "both laudatory and critical to communities everywhere; indeed a template for national use."

### **Services**

After a successful first decade, the Byrnes Health Education Center continues to grow to reach its vision of becoming a leading resource of innovative, high-quality, effective health education. This growth has driven the emergence of four educational platforms: *Teaching Theaters*, *Outreach*, *e-Learning*, and *Wellness Works*.

Currently, five interactive Teaching Theaters are housed at the facility in York, PA. These theaters, and the programs conducted in them, are designed to address health topics as diverse as substance abuse, nutrition, fitness, human physiology, dental health, the five senses, puberty and safety. Each educational standards-based program combines the use of multi-media exhibits, engaging teaching tools, and a dynamic presenter, allowing students to learn by seeing, hearing and doing. Approximately 60,000 visitors come from across Central PA and Northern MD to participate in one of over 40 programs each year.

To reach additional students and to further the message of healthy lifestyles, the Byrnes HEC also offers Outreach programs that are conducted directly in school classrooms.

These programs include an overview of a health-related topic chosen by the classroom teacher, hands-on activity stations, and an organ dissection. Parent volunteers aid in the learning process and help to reinforce the learning points at home.

One of the tenets of the Byrnes HEC's mission is to inspire people of *all* ages, so comprehensive adult programming is also offered. Wellness Works is an adult health education and corporate wellness program designed to assist employees and their family members in making voluntary health behavior changes to reduce health risks, decrease health care costs, and increase individual productivity- all while positively affecting a company's bottom line. The program incorporates a combination of needs assessment, on-site classes, insurance benefit information, evaluation, and e-mail messaging.

With generous support from Highmark Foundation, the Byrnes HEC created e-Learning activities and lesson plans to enable teachers to use the classroom to enhance the health education curriculum and present content in a dynamic and interactive way. The web-based activities employ a variety of media and educational modalities, such as animation, vivid graphics and sound effects to make learning fun. Like the other Byrnes HEC programs, the activities address specific learning objectives, State and National Health and Technology Education Standards and the diverse learning styles of all students. The **LearnToBeHealthy.org** website has already earned two prestigious awards for its *e-Learning* initiative and was recently recognized by three national organizations as a "Best Bet" for teachers across the country. [LearntobeHealthy.org](http://LearntobeHealthy.org) boasts over 17,000 members across the globe.

**To Date: Over 640,000 children and adults have discovered the wonders of life through our dynamic health education programs. They are inspired to take charge of their health.**