



## St. Mary's County Health Department

### NEWS RELEASE

[www.smchd.org](http://www.smchd.org)

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#### **NEW PUBLIC HEALTH MASCOT INTRODUCED DURING PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK**

*Because "Being healthy otter be fun!"*

LEONARDTOWN, MD (April 3, 2006) – Being Healthy "Otter" Be Fun! is the new public health message being spread by St. Mary's County Health Department's first ever agency mascot, "Opie Otter," a cute river otter who will be taking messages of good health to the children of St. Mary's County.

Created by Carole Thieme of Thieme Creative Media in Solomons, MD, "Opie" will be used by the health department in their print communications and community presentations to help make health information more visible to families and children. The health department is introducing its mascot during National Public Health Week, a national education campaign bringing attention to children's health April 3–9, 2006.

This year's theme, designing Healthy Communities: Raising Healthy Kids is calling attention to choices communities make in their overall design that either enhance or hinder the health of children.

The mascot is a new addition to the health departments 'design' to make health topics engaging to children.

"We wanted to bring an agency mascot on board to help us begin teaching healthy habits that will benefit our smallest residents," explained Dr. William Icenhower, St. Mary's County health officer. "If we can reach families and children and teach them the importance of making healthy choices early, and do it in a fun way, perhaps we can prevent health problems from happening later."

**(more)**

The health department is betting that young people will like Opie. “We think that kids will relate well to this little fellow because the river otter lives in our local rivers, is sensitive to the environment, and likes to have fun!,” said Icenhower. The letters of the otters name are an acronym for “Our Purpose is Education,” giving Opie both his name and his mission. Laura Kuchta, administrative assistant at the health department proposed the acronym during a Name the Otter Contest held last year.

Opie’s messages will include information on sun safety, hand washing, immunization, dental care and being physically active every day. Daycares and pre-schools who are interested in bringing Opie’s messages into their activity schedules may call the health department at 301-475-4318.

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