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City Receives Grant From Tobacco Settlement

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The City of Lawton received \$160,000 grant from the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) as a part of TSET's Healthy Communities Incentive Grant Program Friday.

Lawton was recognized as a Certified Healthy City at the "excellent" level during a luncheon and award ceremony at Comanche County Memorial Hospital.

Richard Rogalski, director of community services for the City of Lawton, said the process of making Lawton a healthy city started about a decade ago and has been continuing ever since. He added one of the important milestones for the health initiative in Lawton was in 2011 when TSET funded the position of Kyle Rogers, Fit Kids grant coordinator, who played a major role in helping the city to achieve its health goal.

"Kyle was able to drive us forward toward the Certified Healthy programs," Rogalski said.

In 2012 the City of Lawton was awarded with TSET bronze level award. Rogalski said the money the city received was used to install lights along the trails in Elmer Thomas Park. After getting the bronze award, Rogalski said, the city worked hard to achieve the award of excellence.

"The grant money will be used for putting more lights along the trails in Greer and Elmer Thomas parks; adding more trails for pedestrians, jogging and biking; and adding signage on the trails," Rogalski said. "Lawtonians should be proud of what we have achieved because most of the time we are a forgotten city. One big thing we did was that the City of Lawton prohibited tobacco in city property."

Rogalski said different activities such as the Farmer's Market, Spirit of Survival, tobacco prohibition and bike trails have contributed to Lawton's being recognized as the first metropolitan-size community in Oklahoma to achieve the "excellent" recognition from the Oklahoma Department of Health.

Rogers said organizations in Lawton worked together as partners to achieve the city's goal of creating a healthy community.

"The really great thing about being certified is that we are going to capitalize on this award to create opportunities for healthy lifestyle," Rogers said. "Our goal is to have parks within walking distance and build sidewalks and bike lanes for everyone."

The City of Lawton, Comanche County, the Fit Kids Coalition of Southwest Oklahoma, Comanche County Memorial Hospital, Fort Sill, Lawton Public Schools, Cameron University, Comanche County Health Department and other organization contributed toward the achievement.