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## TOWN OF WALNUT ANNOUNCES NEW WELLNESS CENTER PROJECT

Walnut, MS, August 24, 2016– The Town of Walnut has announced plans to renovate the vacant building located at 130 Smith Drive. The 6,000 square foot construction project will transform the current building into a new exercise facility. More than \$335,000 have been raised to date to support the project. The funds come from the Town of Walnut attaining healthiest hometown designation from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, a grant from Terry and Linda Abby, and from a large contribution by Waste Connections.

*Terry Abby said, "I am very honored to join efforts with the Town of Walnut as they announce the addition of a new wellness center. This wellness center will not only benefit the citizens of Walnut, but also surrounding areas. I am convinced this new resource will empower our community to improve their physical well-being and healthy lifestyle. I would like to commend Mayor Vicki Skinner and the Board of Aldermen for their hard work and dedication in bringing this needed addition to our citizens. I applaud their commitment to improve the people's lives of our great town. I'm honored to call this place home."*

*David Green, District Landfill Manager for Waste Connections, said, "We are honored to participate in the construction of the new wellness center. Waste Connections of Mississippi has long been involved in contributing to the community through donations, scholarships and volunteerism. Our Operating Values include benefitting the communities we live in."*

The Board of Aldermen voted to establish the Health and Wellness Committee on August 1, 2013. They designated Alderman Greg James to serve as chairman and Alderman Kevin Winter to serve as vice chair. Members of the committee were selected by the board from a group of community and business leaders and include Mayor Vicki Skinner, Cody Clifton, Mark Franz, Randle Hall, Caleb James, Tena James, Bonnie Jones, Norris Howell, Sherie Norton, Beth Smith, James Taylor, Rhonda Taylor, Amanda Wilburn, Cory Wilburn, Haley Winter, and Lindsey Cardwell. Board members Skip Wyse, David Nabors and Scott Pulliam round out the group. Resources to plan and develop the initiative were provided by Sheila Grogan and Melissa Stewart from the BCBS Foundation and from Jackie Hawkins with the Mississippi Department of Health. The wellness committee is responsible for ongoing initiatives including the monthly church bulletin insert (Mission Romans 12:1), Lose-A-Ton, tobacco prevention programs at school, educational seminars for the public, community health advocate training, safe routes to schools project and a brand new Healthy Heroes initiative which will be launched in the coming school year in partnership with the Walnut Police and Fire Departments.

*“For too long, Mississippi has been ranked as the worst state in the country pertaining to health factors,” said Greg James, chair of the Health and Wellness Committee. “Even worse, Tippah County is ranked in the bottom half of many state health measures. We began the journey to address the declining quality of life in our community exactly three years ago with an amazing team of dedicated people— Kevin and the members of our wellness committee are all experts in their respective fields. They are a tremendously talented group of people who have gone above and beyond to serve the best interests of this community.” Continuing, James said, “The mayor and board have been incredibly patient and supportive on reaching this goal, but, most importantly, we give honor to God, Who is the source of all our blessings.”*

*“The wellness center announcement marks a milestone in our community’s journey toward a healthier future for ourselves and our children,” said Alderman Kevin Winter. “This facility will be a valuable asset for all demographics in our community, present and future. It represents three-plus years’ worth of dedication hard work, and resilience on the part of the Health and Wellness Committee and its chairman, Greg James, as well as a multi-level collaboration to achieve an important common goal: increase our community’s collective quality of life.”*

The building will be modernized to meet current building codes and will include a new sidewalk connecting the facility to the walking track. The new space will feature an exercise facility designed to address the needs of the Walnut community with installation of cardiovascular equipment and machines for strength and endurance training. Equipment will be obtained with funding from BCBS foundation and the building itself will be purchased and renovated with funding from Waste Connections and a generous consideration from the Abby family.

*Mayor Vicki Skinner said, “The Walnut community is so blessed with this good news for our health and wellness initiative. The new facility will make it easier for our citizens and neighbors and workforce to work out. The example set by groups like*

*Walnut Runs has inspired people to become healthier. The town is blessed to have wide support from the neighborhood to help Walnut become a better place to live.*

The Walnut Wellness Center will feature an updated exterior of brick and eifs (synthetic stucco) and a new entrance on the East side to connect a sidewalk to the walking track across Munn Street. A few windows will also be added to improve natural light. The interior of the building will be upgraded with dividers, restrooms and design elements to complement the experience. Exercise equipment will include cardiovascular machines like treadmills, stair climbers, and elliptical trainers. There will also be a section devoted to strength and endurance training. It is hoped the facility will provide a pathway to build relationships, relieve stress, have fun and be healthy. The committee is working on developing the operating system proposal that will be determined and finalized by the Board of Aldermen. The proposal will recommend membership fees, facility maintenance, security, and flexible availability with card or pin access.

*James explained the importance of the facility: "It was clearly apparent from the beginning that sedentary lifestyles was among the greatest contributors of the chronic diseases that affect our neighborhood. Health issues facing our town have been worsening over the past three decades, but the wellness center will provide additional opportunities to reverse those negative trends."*

*If you would like more information about the wellness initiative, please email [healthywalnut@comcast.net](mailto:healthywalnut@comcast.net) or contact any member of the Wellness Committee.*