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## Keep Your Rear In the Clear: Colorectal Cancer Prevention Education through Collaboration

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**NOTES FROM THE FIELD**

**Keep Your Rear In the Clear:  
Colorectal Cancer Prevention Education through Collaboration**

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Colorectal cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. among men and women, and it is estimated to newly affect over 5,000 Michigan residents this year (American Cancer Society, 2009). Despite a decline in incidence and mortality rates in recent years, there is still much progress to be made in public awareness and knowledge around colorectal health. The Colorectal Cancer Awareness Network (CRAN) of Southeastern Michigan, developed under the leadership of the American Cancer Society (ACS), is a community network consisting of members from local hospitals, health departments, insurance providers and other individuals with a vested interest in colorectal cancer. Considering rising unemployment, loss of health insurance and rise of obesity in the metro Detroit area, CRAN called for a local and innovative approach to colorectal health promotion that provided not only messages about prevention, but also information about free or low cost screenings. The goal was to “think outside the box” of delivering traditional community health messages through print materials or media messages alone.

The fitting opportunity arose to bring the Colossal Colon<sup>®</sup>, or “CoCo”, to metro Detroit. CoCo, a project of The Colon Club ([www.colossalcolon.com](http://www.colossalcolon.com)) is a 40 ft long; 4-ft tall replica of the human colon designed to educate the public, raise awareness, and diminish the stigma associated with colon cancer and other colorectal diseases. CRAN brought CoCo to the Detroit Science Center in March 2009, during national Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

Successful completion of this endeavor required sharing of tangible and intangible resources, recruitment and training of volunteers, and a year's worth of coalition planning. Rental fees and materials amounted to thousands of dollars that individual CRAN member organizations (mainly non-profits or government institutions) may not have been able to do on their own, however the local collaboration allowed for a sharing of these costs. Other resources contributed by CRAN members included staff time, in-house printing, physicians and spokespersons for media opportunities, website development, volunteers and more.

Educational activities were developed to enhance the visual messages provided by Coco, particularly for youth. Nutritional messages were provided through an age-tailored card game and food models from the local university students. A Resource Guidebook was created

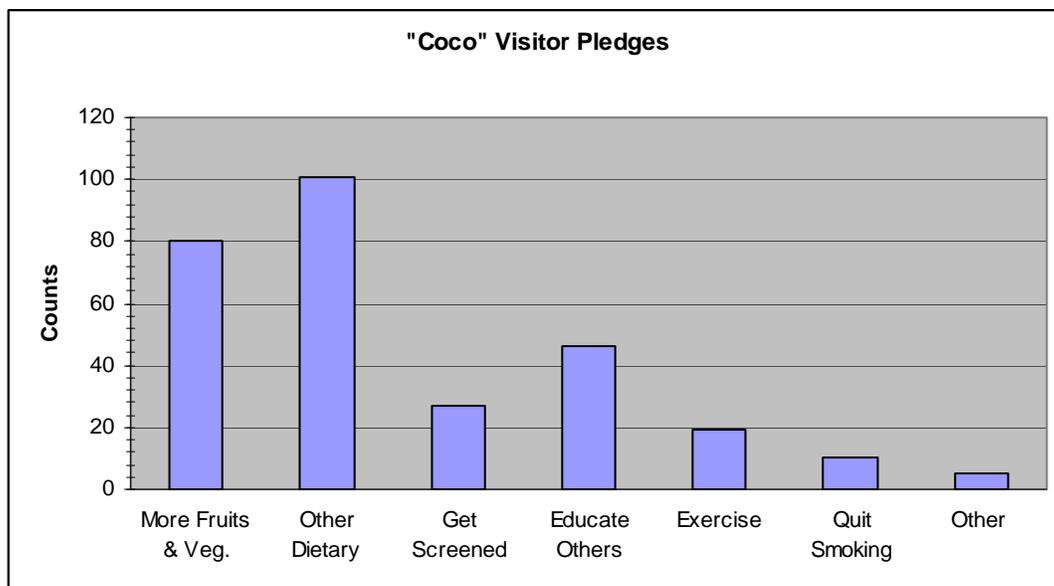


specifically for this exhibit and included resources for colorectal screening and prevention along with activities for youth. Visitors could also view a DVD created by ACS explaining the various screening methods for colorectal cancer.

As a community partner, the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service Midwest Region provided event volunteer recruitment and evidence-based training support using an adaptation of NCI’s *Cancer 101* program. Volunteers provided critical assistance during the event by supervising the exhibit, guiding visitors through the various activities, and fielding general questions about colorectal health. Event volunteers were primarily recruited through promotion in the Michigan Nursing Association’s newsletter, *Michigan Nurse*. Volunteers represented a variety of professional fields, including community/social service personnel, graduate students, medical and nursing students, cancer survivors and co-survivors. Nearly 150 volunteers served in the week-long event.

In addition to volunteer leadership, overall project management was provided by CRAN members from the American Cancer Society & the Karmanos Cancer Institute. Although planning and resources were contributed from the CRAN membership as a whole, leadership was necessary to keep the planning process moving on schedule, provide a primary contact to key constituents and serve as executive decision makers in the planning process.

Over 3,000 community members visited Coco during the one week exhibit and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Many visitors spoke about the personal impact of the event, including needing to talk to their doctors about getting screened, having family health history discussions, or increasing their fruit and vegetable intake and physical activity levels. Impact assessment data was collected by asking participants to make a “pledge”. Those who chose to make a pledge focused on dietary changes more so than screening or other behavior changes – reflective of the younger audience of the Detroit Science Center.



Well planned collaboration, leveraging of resources, organized volunteer recruitment and utilization, along with defined leadership roles were key to the success of this program. This model is not specific to colorectal cancer and could be easily replicated in other community-based health arenas. In a time when budgets, staff, and resources are being cut; public health practitioners use of innovative programs, collaboration in planning and resource use, along with volunteerism will be vital for delivering effective community health events.

For more information visit [www.colossalcolon.com](http://www.colossalcolon.com) and [www.detroitcolossalcolon.com](http://www.detroitcolossalcolon.com).



*“CoCo” at the Detroit Science Center*

