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Dr. Sid Gautam is offering free happiness yoga classes at the Honeycutt Kiwanis Recreation Center.

Holistic Health Summit a step toward wellness

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By Sean Neal Staff writer

A recent headline caught Sid Gautam's attention, and it startled him: Cumberland County ranks 73rd in the state in length and quality of life.

Of the state's 100 counties, other urban counties similar to Cumberland ranked in top spots, including Wake at No. 1. The report was conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Gautam, who has a nonprofit organization called the Society to Educate People, was spurred to action.

On Saturday the organization will host a Holistic Health Summit from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Fayetteville Technical Community College's Horace Sisk Gymnasium.

The summit, led by Gautam, is a one-day event dedicated to the health of the body, mind and spirit. Speakers will present a range of topics including Pranayama, or the science of breath control, stress, exercise and diet. Admission is free.

Gautam said the goal of the summit is to move Cumberland to at least the top 50, or even the top 10 counties in state in next year's report.

"I call it a wakeup call," said Gautam. "There is no reason that Cumberland has to be at the bottom."

Gautam is a former entrepreneurship professor at Methodist University, and he is currently a "preacher of good health and happiness." He teaches monthly Happiness Yoga sessions and is the author of the book "Happiness is You."

Gautam said part of what he wants to convey at the summit is the matter of the Standard American Diet, or S.A.D. Contributing to the S.A.D., 20 percent of the calories Americans consume are found in sugary drinks, Gautam said. He encourages people to drink more water.

Diet is not the only aspect of health addressed at the summit. Speaker Tom McCutchen, a former pediatrician and author of "Embracing Stress in Your Life," will speak on the issue of stress.

"Here's the thing about stress," McCutchen said. "It's a response we make to the demands placed upon us. We need that little bit of tension to keep us going."

He will talk about what stress is, how to recognize it and some tips on how to deal with it.

"The trick is to live with it well," McCutchen said. "Kind of have all your butterflies fly in the same direction."

Other speakers will include Swami Chidananda, an ordained monk from India; Kelsy Timas, the CEO of Guiding Wellness Inc.; and Gurvinder Singh, who teaches yoga in Bangalore, India.

Each seminar will be divided by light exercise - yoga, Pilates and Tai Chi - or meditation sessions.

"Health is like water," Gautam said. "It never becomes a priority. When there's too much, and you're almost drowning, or too little, like drought, then people become concerned."

Register at steppress.org. Registration ends Wednesday.