

Healthy women helping Healthy Kids

SANTA CRUZ -- Nearly 50 women came together Friday to support one woman's vision to raise money for Healthy Kids at a time when funding is hard to come by.

Healthy Kids, designed to provide health care coverage for all children in the county, covers about 1,950 Santa Cruz County children. But with every nonprofit feeling strapped by state cutbacks, the program is concerned about future funding.

The plight of Healthy Kids has been featured in a special Sentinel series that concludes today.

Six years after she served as a steering committee member for Healthy Kids, Jeri Ross is hoping to help the program through a new venture, her Web site bodibuddie.com.

The Web site is for women to form networks geared toward health and fitness. On Friday, Ross officially launched the site.

On the site, women can share what works for them and what doesn't and to connect and work out together. They can also buy health care products recommended by other buddies.

During the launch event Friday, women watched demonstrations of those products that were for sale, sampled hors d'oeuvres and wine from Roudon-Smith and won raffle prizes including free sessions with a personal trainer, dinner out on the town and sailing trips.

"This site is really about us coming together and to help benefit Healthy Kids," Ross said. "I worked for the county for 16 years. My heart has always been in Santa Cruz County."

Ross's granddaughter, Sarina Martinez, 14, was one of the first poster children for Healthy Kids when she was 4.

"We did a photo shoot with her to make a brochure promoting Healthy Families and Healthy Kids that's been used ever since," Ross said. "Through the photo shoot, my son was able to find out about the program and we enrolled his daughter. She was one of the first success stories for Healthy Kids. It gave her the solid ability to have health care and now she turned into a beautiful young adult. This program turns lives around."

Ross raised \$1,000 Friday, which would almost cover one child for a year under Healthy Kids. For the rest of January, 10 percent of sales from the site will also be donated to Healthy Kids.