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Rural Health Research Institute Awarded Grant to Prevent Childhood Obesity

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The executive director of Georgia Southern University's Rural Health Research Institute (RHRI), Bryant Smalley, Ph.D., has been awarded an \$85,000 federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to collaboratively form a new network focused on childhood obesity prevention in rural South Georgia. The initiative, South Georgia Network to End Childhood Obesity (SGNECO), is funded through a network development planning grant from HRSA's Office of Rural Health Policy.

Bryant Smalley, Ph.D., is the executive director of the Rural Health Research Institute.

Bryant Smalley, Ph.D., is the executive director of the Rural Health Research Institute.

"I am very excited for us to have received this funding to help focus attention and resources to the ever-growing threat of childhood obesity in our region," said Smalley, who co-authored the book *Always the Fat Kid: The Truth about the Enduring Effects of Childhood Obesity*, published in April. "It is an ever-present and increasing threat to the health of our children, and bold actions and partnerships are needed to address this nationwide issue."

SGNECO will be initially comprised of representatives from the RHRI, Mercer University's Center for Rural Health and Health Disparities, the Southeast Health District and the State Office of Rural Health. The grant year will be spent creating by-laws for the network, conducting community needs assessments in the 16-county target region and completing a multi-year strategic plan to guide the network's operations over the next several years. "Childhood obesity is at a crisis level in rural Georgia," said Charles Owens, executive director of the Georgia State Office of Rural Health. "It is exciting to be a part of developing a solution to give our children a brighter future with better health, which will improve the lives of rural Georgians for generations."

The RHRI is an interdisciplinary hub of rural health research and outreach. Its mission is to improve health in rural areas by promoting cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research and outreach that connects faculty from diverse fields and promotes the development of researchers examining rural health issues. To learn more, visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu/RHRI.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers 125 degree programs serving more than 20,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu.

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