

NATIONAL LEAD POISONING PREVENTION WEEK



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

Chris Amato of the Historic South Initiative leads a tour with members of the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition, highlighting the work being accomplished with the state Lead Safe Home Fund to remediate lead paint-contaminated housing in the Old South End in Toledo. "We need to do this together and that is the message we need to get out," Mr. Amato said.

Area coalition, advocacy groups work to combat toxic exposure

Levels in Ohio rank 2nd in U.S.

By **NANCY GAGNET**
BLADE STAFF WRITER

At 5.2 percent, the rate of children with elevated blood lead levels in Ohio is well above the national average of 1.9 percent.

In fact, Ohio has the second-highest lead levels when compared to other states, said Gabriella Celeste of Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition, an organization that works to secure public funding for lead abatement home programs.

"This is a problem that we actually know how to solve," Ms. Celeste said Wednesday during a news conference at the Sofia Quintero Art & Cultural Center on Broadway Street in Toledo. The event aimed to highlight investments that have been made to mitigate lead in homes.

The main exposure from lead in children comes from



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Tim Johnson of the Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition speaks at the event. "If you don't tackle this early at the prevention stage, you will pay for it downstream," Mr. Johnson said.

the dust from the paint found on walls, windows, and porches of homes that were built in 1979 or earlier, she said. Currently two-thirds of Ohio's housing stock was built during that time, Ms. Celeste said.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention, lead exposure can seriously harm a child's health and can potentially lead to damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems, and hearing and speech problems.

"While screening and test-

ing kids is critical, we don't wait for kids to be the lead detectors," Ms. Celeste said. "We want to get there ahead of the game to prevent kids from being exposed."

Representatives from several local agencies including Ohio Healthy Homes Network and the Historic South Initiative were on hand at the news conference as well as elected officials. The event also included a tour of the Old South End neighborhood, where several homes have been rehabilitated through an extensive program, much of which involved lead abatement work.

Standing in an 1,100 square-foot home on Eastern Avenue, where new floors, cabinets, and windows have been installed in a house that was gutted and rebuilt through the program, contractor Denny McPartland explained how the lead-safe practices were applied. The crew wore protective gear and

Fetterman's debate raises questions

Democrats concerned in crucial Pa. Senate race

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania Democrat John Fetterman's rocky debate performance fueled concern inside his party on Wednesday, as leaders assessed whether it would significantly shift a race that could decide control of the U.S. Senate and the future of President Biden's presidency.

Appearing on stage five months after his stroke, Mr. Fetterman, Pennsylvania's 53-year-old lieutenant governor, struggled to complete sentences, and he jumbled words throughout the hourlong televised event.

That was no surprise for medical professionals, who noted that the format, including time limits on answers, was the opposite of what a person recovering from a stroke would need to support his communication.

And for those who have known Mr. Fetterman for years, the debate was a reminder that he was never a smooth orator — even before



Oz Fetterman

But with so much hanging on his campaign, some Democrats expressed concern that Mr. Fetterman's appearance at Tuesday night's debate was a mistake. While he would have been criticized for skipping the forum, they felt that might have been better than exposing him in such a difficult environment — for a performance that his Republican opponent, Dr. Mehmet Oz, can exploit in ads and social media clips in the closing days of the contest.

"In retrospect, he probably shouldn't have debated," former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, a Democrat, said in an interview. "But the key is he is

See LEAD, Page A3



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

Gabriella Celeste, center, of The Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition goes on a tour. 'While screening and testing kids is critical, we don't wait for kids to be the lead detectors,' Ms. Celeste said. 'We want to get there ahead of the game to prevent kids from being exposed.'

Lead

Continued from Page A1

used fans to keep the dust down while also keeping windows closed on the side of the house where neighbors lived until the lead was removed.

"The neighbors were a big concern," he said.

Since the Old South End rehabilitation initiative began eight years ago, just over 100 homes have been rehabilitated in the neighborhood, which is an area bounded by the Anthony Wayne Trail, the Maumee River, and I-75. The goal, said Chris Amato, president and chief executive of the Historic South Initiative, is to restore 1,000 homes in that area, while also ramping up

educational services, commercial properties, and job programming for those who live there.

"The advocacy at the state level has really allowed us to fast forward what we are doing," Mr. Amato said. "We need to do this together and that is the message we need to get out."

The most recent budget signed by Gov. Mike DeWine and approved by the Ohio General Assembly includes \$6.8 million in lead poisoning prevention through the Lead Safe Home Fund which has been awarded through a grant process to the following organizations: Maumee Valley Habitat for Humanity, Clark County Combined Health District, Franklin County Public Health, Marion County

Public Health, and West Ohio Community Action Partnership.

To invest in future generations and ensure the health and safety of communities, especially for children, such funding for lead abatement initiatives must continue, said Tim Johnson of Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition.

"There is still a lot more work left to be done," he said. "There is no real cost savings by not investing in this. If you don't tackle this early at the prevention stage, you will pay for it downstream."

The event took place in conjunction with the National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, which runs through Saturday.

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