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TOP STORY

## Nutritious cooking

Child nutrition programs get healthy refresher course

By JOHANNA BERNHARD H&N Staff Reporter Mar 19, 2017

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H&N photo by Kevin N. Hume

Garrett Berdan, a chef and culinary nutrition consultant, congratulates school food service professionals on a job well done after they split up into teams to cook 15 different recipes at an Oregon Cooks for Kids regional culinary workshop at Henley High School on Friday.

Sweet and savory aromas wafted through the Henley High School cafeteria on Friday as members of child nutrition programs from around the region gathered for a culinary workshop to create a series of

nutritious recipes geared toward providing healthy meals and snacks for their students.

For the past seven years, chef Garrett Berdan, with the Oregon Department of Education Child Nutrition Services, has partnered with the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council to coach child nutrition program professionals on cooking innovative and healthy meals using nutrient-rich, local foods.

Throughout the year, the team hosts a series of free statewide culinary trainings for school nutrition directors and cooks, teaching them how to enhance the nutrition value of their students' meals and to cook from scratch. With Berdan's assistance, participants also practice knife skills, batch cooking, weights and measures.

"We get a group of like minded child nutrition professionals together, they learn skills from me but they also learn skills from each other, so there's a lot of networking that happens," he said. "We hear from evaluations that they go home excited and energized, ready to try something new."

On Friday, 20 participants from regional communities, including the Klamath County School District, Klamath KID Center, Oakridge and Central Point, were split into five groups and each given three items from the menu to create.

The array of items included sweet chili chicken thighs, Cubano sandwiches, vegetable cups, fruit smoothies and turkey pumpkin chili.

The trainings reinforce national guidelines on food regulations so everything the participants cook meets the U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines, Crista Hawkins, Director of School Programs for the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council, said.

"We really are a role model for things that are practical and useful for schools in child nutrition programs," she said. "Participants talk to their colleagues and discuss how they can implement healthy changes at their schools."

One healthy example, Hawkins said, is adding fresh blueberries or strawberries to a bowl of canned fruit to make it look more appealing to children and provide them with fresh nutrients that are grown locally in Oregon.

A majority of the recipes used during the trainings are from Food Hero, a local initiative of Oregon Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed), developed by Oregon State

University Extension Service.

Chef Berdan said he took 72 family-sized recipes from the website and scaled them up in size to produce the quantity needed to feed hundreds of hungry mouths at schools or child care programs.

“Kids might get used to having a particular meal at home and then they come to school and recognize the same thing so they want to eat it,” he said.

One of Friday’s teams consisted of a dishwasher from Mae Richardson Elementary School in Central Point, looking to expand her cooking skills and help more in the kitchen; the head cook from Prosper Charter School hoping to learn some new recipes; the executive director of the Klamath KID Center; and Henley High School assistant cook Jennifer Gladwill.

“A lot of this stuff is not stuff that we usually are allowed to order for our schools so we’re hoping that our boss will start allowing new recipes, new tastes and get more kids to eat,” Gladwill said. “Even if we can’t do it every day, we’re hoping to expand.”

The trainings utilize ingredients grown in Oregon, such as blueberries, wheat and local dairy products. Many schools receive grant funding for farm-to-school purchases to encourage them to buy their produce locally, Hawkins said.

With a desire to build the relationship between farm-to-table, dairy farmers Audrey and Bouke De Hoop from Holland’s Dairy Inc. in the Poe Valley, attended the training on Friday to see how their products are used in schools.

“It’s all about nutrition,” Bouke De Hoop said. “We strive to produce the best quality products and the schools try to produce the best quality products with those so kids can eat nutritious meals. It’s a chain reaction.”

At the end of the session, Chef Berdan commended the participants on their success, adding that when tasting their food they should consider if their students would also enjoy what they prepared and if not, think of adaptations that would work for students of all age ranges.

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