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Creating a healthy community

Emily Lindstrand Thursday, February 04, 2016



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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Students at Clackamas River Elementary School enjoy the 'Food Hero' program's monthly visits to the school cafeteria.

Students in Kari Hulseley's fourth-grade class at Clackamas River Elementary School are becoming experts on food.

Through the Oregon State University Extension SNAP-Ed nutrition program, students at Clackamas River, River Mill Elementary School and Estacada Junior High are learning ways to incorporate better nutrition into their daily lives. The program encourages families on a limited budget to make healthy food choices.

Dubbed "Food Hero," the four-year-old program brings a new, healthy dish to Clackamas River and River Mill cafeterias each month.

Beret Halverson of OSU's Family and Community Health program said children are more likely to eat foods if they have some familiarity with them, so the program tries to expose students to a wide variety of healthy foods.

Recent offerings include hummus with carrots, pumpkin cookies and whole-grain Spanish rice.

The program also offers classroom lessons once a week for eight weeks. In the classroom, students learn about a variety of nutrition-related topics, including how to read food labels and how to eat a balanced diet.

Hulseley says her class enjoys the program.

"Students look forward to it," Hulseley said. "They really enjoy every aspect."

Her students agree, saying the instruction has made them more informed about food.

"Sometimes when you eat, you don't actually think about it, but it's important to make healthy choices," said Rosalino Mendoza.

"You have to be careful about sugar," added Nedra Baird.

"It's important to pay attention, so you know what to do to be healthy," said Andrew Reidel.

In addition to promoting healthy eating at school, "Food Hero" hopes to encourage healthy eating for the whole family.

"The hope is that they'll go home and talk to their parents about what they've learned (in the "Food Hero" program)," Hulseley said.

The program's website, www.foodhero.org (<http://www.foodhero.org>), is equipped with recipes for families to use.

"The goal is to have easy and simple recipes for busy families, with items they already have in their pantry," said Halverson.

In addition to a collection of healthy recipes, the website also has information on meal ideas, budgeting and shopping.

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"Food Hero" also offers a monthly newsletter with additional information about nutrition.

Additionally, students can put their knowledge to practical use in an after-school program called "Kids in the Kitchen."

Now in its second year in Estacada, "Kids in the Kitchen" gives students an opportunity to cook recipes found on the "Food Hero" website. The program consists of 40 elementary school students and 20 middle school students.

Erin Devlin of OSU's Family and Community Health program believes the independence that "Kids in the Kitchen" teaches students is valuable.

"It empowers kids," Devlin said. "They usually pay more attention to nutrition and food safety when they're doing it themselves."

Devlin said that like "Food Hero," "Kids in the Kitchen" benefits the entire family.

"(Kids) get excited about it, and they get their families excited about it," she said. "They can cook the recipes together."

Hulsey sees value in the programs and enjoys seeing her students learn about nutrition.

"(This age group) is awesome because you can talk to them about how food affects the body, and they'll understand it," she said.

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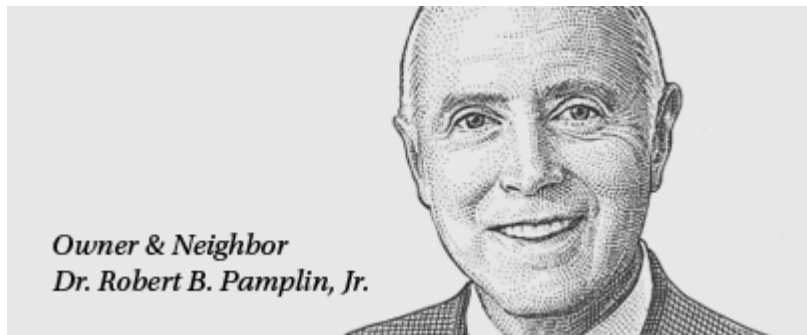
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