

HABIT-FORMING RABBIT

Program Turns Kids On to Healthy Eating

BY NAOMI GOLDBERG



It's a sunny day in April at Sun Valley's Community School. An eager group of fifth graders crowds around a table laden with vegetables. It's the third year they've participated in Nurture Idaho's "Food and Fun" program, and they watch Parry Gripp's rap video "I Like Vegetables," bopping along to lyrics like "Let me hear you shout, I'm gonna get crazy on a Brussels sprout" and "Some people bring soda to your house and share it, but the party don't start 'til I show up with my carrot."

An instructor wearing a bright white Nurture apron dramatically pulls Samantha Bunny, a brown and white rabbit, out of a cage. The kids squeal in delight as the bunny hops around, munching on bright, crunchy carrots.

"Samantha is Nurture's" poster child for eating vegetables, said Kathryn Guylay, Nurture Idaho's founder and regional director. After Samantha's arrival, the class jumped into a discussion on the benefits of different vegetables. The lesson concluded with a quick cooking demonstration, and the 10-year-olds left the classroom with huge smiles on their faces, mouths full of crunchy carrots.

According to its website, Nurture's mission is to educate children, families and communities about making healthy, affordable food choices and getting physically active. "There is a lot of nutrition curriculum out there," Guylay said. "But Nurture is able to tailor to the group's needs,

taking kids' interests and building activities around them to make the learning and healthy eating relevant for them. It has to be hands-on. It has to be fun!"

A month after the fifth graders complete their yearlong Nurture program, they remember Samantha best, explaining that she taught them that veggies are good and healthy. One little boy said he reads labels a lot more to check for sugar. And the class agreed making the food and healthy snacks, like yogurt parfait and smoothies, was fun and yummy. Bev McNeal, the fifth graders' teacher, said her students always enjoy the eating best, and she loves that Nurture introduced her students to healthy snack options.

For the past three years, Nurture has collaborated with organizations in the Wood River Valley, such as Higher Ground, Blaine County Schools, and Community School. Nurture sends trained nutritionists to deliver programs called "Food & Fun," "A Taste of Slow Cooking" and "Star Fruits and Veggies." Cooking and eating delicious and healthy food is central to the classes, and by getting students excited about cooking, Nurture encourages healthy eating without lectures or guilt trips.

"What's more grassroots than kids taking responsibility and being ambassadors of healthy eating?" Guylay said.

Photo by Katherine Guylay

Guylay, who has two children of her own, takes healthy eating seriously. In 2004, she was living in the Chicago area, working towards her nutritional counselor certificate, when she read about the diabetes and obesity problem in low-income populations. Determined to address the misconception that “being rich” is a prerequisite for eating healthy, she started experimenting with low-cost, high-nutrition meals using whole grains and seasonal vegetables.


Starting in food pantries and social services agencies in the Chicago area, Guylay began distributing whole foods and slow cookers to low-income families. As the program grew, Guylay developed a curriculum that was delivered primarily by volunteers to community members throughout Chicagoland. When she moved to Idaho in 2011, she brought the program with her and started Nurture Idaho.

Last year, Guylay and a team of Nurture educators worked in elementary and middle schools from Sun Valley to Gooding, introducing Samantha Bunny to kids in nearly every grade, sharing the dangers of sugary snacks and teaching kids how to make and enjoy healthy foods. Nurture also hosted Parent Education and Community workshops, teaching adults how to find more information about healthy foods and share it with their families. Nurture’s website, NurtureYourFamily.org, provides nutritious, affordable recipes and gives links to Nurture curricula.


After three years of delivering classes throughout the Wood River Valley and beyond, Guylay and Nurture are gearing up for big changes

this fall as Nurture Idaho transitions into the Nurture Foundation. Rather than directly serving the community through Nurture curricula, the foundation will distribute funds from an endowment to community organizations. Guylay sees this as a way to empower the communities to create and implement long-lasting nutrition and wellness programs.

Though Nurture curricula and training will still be available, this change will allow Guylay to refocus her time and energy on training partners to “do Nurture.” Guylay envisions a cadre of “impact teams,” well-armed nutrition advocates who teach community members about the importance, ease and delight of healthy eating. She said the first Nurture Foundation grants will be awarded soon, funding new and existing healthy food programs in the Wood River Valley indefinitely.

And though Samantha’s traveling days may be slowing, she will continue to make appearances, munching those healthy carrots and inspiring kids and adults to discover the joys and benefits of healthy cooking. 

Naomi Goldberg is a teacher at Community School in Sun Valley. After living in Ketchum for eight years, she’s happy to be raising her young daughter in such a beautiful, healthy and food-conscious place.



EDUCATE Fresh Ideas...

Delicious dishes and master chefs are standard fare on Idaho Public Television.

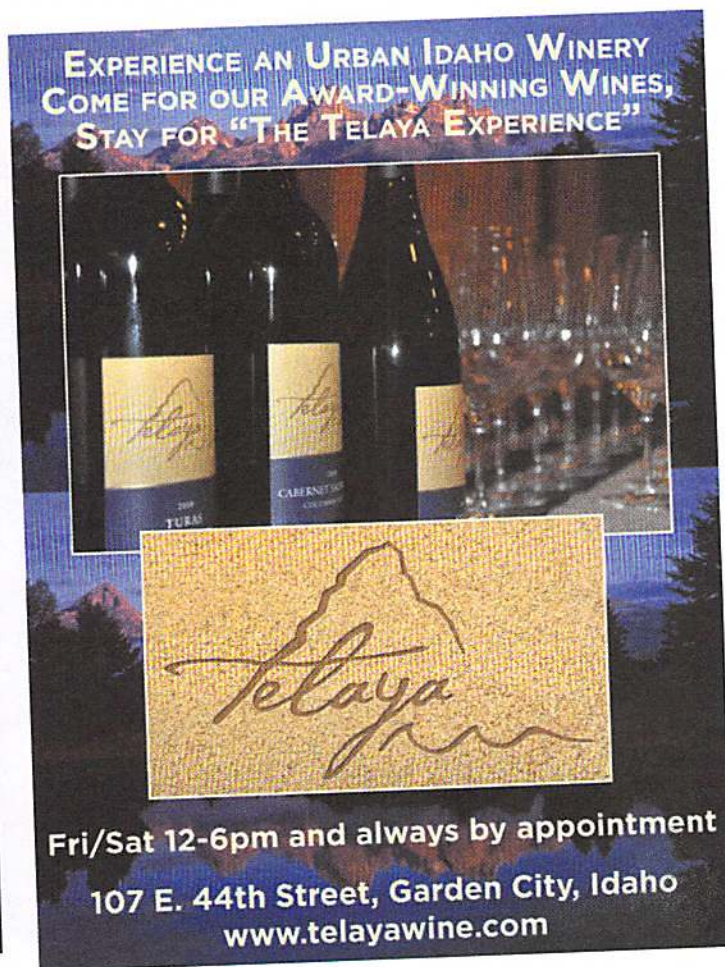
For listings and showtimes visit us at idahoptv.org

LEARN / CREATE

IDAHO

IDAHO PUBLIC TELEVISION
idahoptv.org

Educate • Inform • Inspire



EXPERIENCE AN URBAN IDAHO WINERY
COME FOR OUR AWARD-WINNING WINES,
STAY FOR “THE TELAYA EXPERIENCE”

Telaya

Fri/Sat 12-6pm and always by appointment
107 E. 44th Street, Garden City, Idaho
www.telayawine.com