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Cooking Up Fun at Oak Terrace Elementary School/Nurture's Spring Benefit to Help Fund Nutrition Programs

By: wck002

05/06/10 12:36 PM 68 hits



A proud student at Oak Terrace demonstrates her "edible art" made from fresh fruit.

Third, fourth and fifth graders gathered after school recently in the teachers' lounge at Oak Terrace School in Highwood for their first in a series of nutrition classes provided by North Shore-based non-profit Nurture. Nurture's mission of reducing childhood obesity and increasing health and wellness fits right in with the goals of the administration at Oak Terrace School. For the past two years, this school has been the recipient of the USDA's fruit and vegetable grant to provide students with fresh and seasonal produce each week. Nurture's volunteers arrive each Thursday morning to assist the teachers in getting the kids excited about trying their "star" fruit or vegetable of the week. Every Friday the learning continues with hands-on healthy cooking for students in the after school program. Each class consists of interactive lessons, crafts, activities and recipes that are aimed at helping the children make healthier lifestyle choices. For their first after-school lesson, "Break the Fast", the children decorated aprons and listened intently while Nurture Health Educators Elizabeth Thomas and Elizabeth Brennan taught them about the importance (and components) of a well

balanced breakfast. The children learned how breakfast can impact their day and that kids who eat breakfast do better in school, concentrate more easily, and score higher on standardized tests. They talked about the three things to include in a healthy breakfast - a whole grain food, a lean protein, and a serving of fruit.

An example activity that children engage in during a Nurture class was demonstrated by the "Cereal Detective" game during which children read and compared nutritional information on cereal boxes and discussed the amounts of fiber, sugar and protein in the various breakfast cereals. Then it was on to creating "Breakfast Pizza," made with whole wheat flatbread, almond butter, sliced bananas, raisins and honey. While the children were preparing their pizzas, steel cut oats were cooking in a rice cooker to be combined with mashed strawberries, bananas, and nonfat yogurt for another great breakfast creation. The children left for home happy, full, and a little more knowledgeable about nutrition.

Nurture, in collaboration with social service agencies such as Family Network of Highland Park and food pantries such as Northfield Township Food Pantry, reaches out and touches the lives of hundreds of families each year. Expanding their original concept of teaching adult classes as the main focus, in 2010 Nurture launched its programs in local schools in order to reach large groups of children.

The board of Nurture will hold its second annual Spring Benefit on May 22nd, 2010 from 7 - 11 p.m. The event will be hosted by Nurture Founder Kathryn Guylay and her husband Jeff Guylay of Winnetka. Guests will enjoy home-made canapés, made with the whole, healthy foods the program promotes, homemade desserts, and Nurture Nectar. All monies raised will directly benefit local, limited-resource families who receive food, cooking classes, and cooking equipment as well as nutritional and fitness education through Nurture's programs. Corporate sponsors for the evening include Hamilton Beach, Peapod, Procter Silex, Schaeffer's Wines, Foods and Spirits, First Bank & Trust and Whole Foods. To request an invitation or to learn more about Nurture and its programs, visit www.nurtureyourfamily.org.

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