

Students provided summer meals

Local schools provide free lunch for students

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

The small grassy area behind Umatilla-Morrow Head Start office in Hermiston slowly filled on Wednesday afternoon, as children and parents lined up for the summer lunch program.

The free program, which runs weekdays from June 11 to Aug. 10, offers daily meals from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. for kids of all ages, and has developed into a place where children can find a nutritious meal and enjoy a variety of games and lessons.

"It's fun stuff and good eats," said Alea Garrett, a middle schooler who has come to the program with her mom and siblings since last summer.

Her mother, Melissa Garrett, said the activities were her children's favorite part of the day, and that she was pleased with the variety of meals offered.

Toni Eddy, UMCHS children's nutrition manager, said they try to vary the daily menu. One day this week they served tuna salad sandwiches, and another there were crunchy Hawaiian chicken wraps. Each day they also serve fresh fruit, vegetables and milk.

"It meets a need financially for the parents, and



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Hunter Steffen, 8, and his sister, Kennedy Steffen, 4, eat lunch with their brothers at the Umatilla-Morrow Head Start summer meals program Wednesday in Hermiston.

nutritionally for the kids," Eddy said.

She said the program has been active for at least five years, and that all free meal programs in the area help fill a need during the summer.

"We have a high number of children who qualify for free and reduced lunch," she said. "Parents have to figure out how to make their limited income stretch over meals the kids would normally get at school. These programs help supplement their budget, help them cover other bills, make food stamps last through the month."

Eddy said participation has varied, but they averaged about 50 meals per day last year. They are able to serve 100 per day. Meals that aren't served are kept for a day, and then donated to Desert Rose Ministries.

Meals are offered to any child age 1-18. Meals are not offered to adults, but

many parents will bring a lunch of their own and sit with their child. Eddy said if adults volunteer at the program, helping to set up or clean, they can also get a meal.

Many local lunch programs also offer daily activities and services for kids and their families. On Wednesday, UMCHS had a painting activity for kids, and Advantage Dental was doing free screenings and fluoride coatings for children and adults on-site.

Eddy said programs range from arts and crafts to physical activities, and speakers and visitors from the community.

"It's not only a nutritious meal, but an activity to help with cognitive development," she said.

Umatilla School District also has an extensive summer meal program. Because of construction at the elementary and middle



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Tabitha Woodie, Umatilla-Morrow Head Start health resources specialist, talks about foods that are "good for your teeth" with Marcus Chapman, 6, during their summer meals program on Wednesday in Hermiston.

schools they are limited to one kitchen, but the district will offer both breakfast and lunch to students at several different sites. Parents can also purchase a meal for \$2.

Rikkilynn Larsen, the child nutrition director, said she hopes to expand the program to include dinner later in the summer, as they did last year.

Larsen said based on last year's numbers, they're planning to serve about 500 per day. She said each meal will feature a hot and cold option, as well as local fruits and vegetables when possible.

They will also have daily activities including basketball and hula hoops, as well as art projects, small gardening projects and scavenger hunts.

Larsen said she posts the menus daily on the district website, as well as on Facebook.

Almost every school district or city has some sort of free lunch program for students. Families can look up meal locations statewide by calling 2-1-1, texting "Food" or "Comida" to 877-877, or visiting summerfoodoregon.org/map.

Echo: July 9 to August 2, Monday - Thursday from 11

to 11:30 a.m. Echo School, 600 E. Gerone St.

Hermiston: June 11 to June 22 at Armand Larive, 1497 S.W. Ninth St., and Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St.

June 12 to 29 at Sunset Elementary School, 300 E. Catherine Ave. Breakfast from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. and lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

June 11 - Aug. 10 at Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, 110 N.E. Fourth Street, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Stanfield: June 11 to July 19, 12 to 12:15 p.m., Stanfield Public Library, 180 W. Coe Ave.

Umatilla: June 18 to August 17 (excluding July 4)

Breakfast 8 to 9 a.m. at Umatilla High School, 1400 Seventh Street. Lunch at Umatilla High School and at Marina Park, 1710 Quincy Ave., from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. At Kiwanis Park, 129 Walla Walla St., from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

Nutrition specialists mixing it up with school lunches

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

While pizza, sloppy Joes and chicken nuggets still make an appearance in school cafeterias sometimes, today's school lunches are not what they used to be.

"I like to encourage parents to go have lunch with their students at school at least one time to see how things have changed," chef Garrett Berdan said. "They might be surprised to see the variety, the different colors, the love and care that goes into them."

Berdan was at Umatilla High School on Friday, teaching child nutrition program professionals from schools and daycares around Eastern Oregon for a training sponsored by the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council and the Oregon Department of Education's Child Nutrition Services. The annual trainings cover a variety of topics, such as evidence-based lunchroom design that helps encourage kids to make healthier eating choices. Friday morning's training included a section on knife skills with fruits and vegetables and fresh herbs.

By 1 p.m. attendees had cooked 16 different recipes and everyone sat down to try the buffet of options. They loaded up plates with arroz con pollo, spicy Asian noodles with tofu, fiesta chicken chili, Brazilian rice and beans, berry smoothies, oatmeal, roasted garbanzo beans and more.

Most of the recipes, Berdan said, were adapted from the Food Hero program that Oregon State University's extension service uses to teach families about affordable, nutritious cooking (anyone can look up recipes at www.foodhero.org).

"It's nice to have those



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL
Attendees at a regional school and childcare nutrition training sample different recipes for lunch at Umatilla High School.

recipes featured at school, because there's a good chance they have already tasted them at home, especially if their families are SNAP recipients," he said.

U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for school and childcare nutrition have gotten more strict in the past 20 years, Berdan said, which presents more of a challenge but also means that in many cases students today are eating healthier meals at school than their parents did.

Menus will vary depending on who runs the kitchen, but for the most part culinary specialists are encouraged to offer a more diverse selection that represents a variety of cultures.

Rikkilynn Larson, child nutrition director for Umatilla School District, said Friday was the second time Umatilla had played host to one of the state's continuing education trainings. Last time she picked up a few new recipes she incorpo-

rated into Umatilla school lunches, including a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich with roasted tomatoes. This time she found a few more she wanted to try.

"It's so amazing," she said. "I always learn something new."

As attendees tasted the various recipes, accompanied by Armand Larive Mid-

dle School students who were documenting the event for ALTV, they discussed ways to adapt them for their own students. Several people thought the fiesta chicken chili turned out too spicy for younger students, for example, and one table decided they would add pineapple juice to the berry smoothie to sweeten it without adding sugar. Some attendees discussed which recipes could be used for students who are gluten-free, dairy-free or have other dietary restrictions — something that has become increasingly common.

Larsen said it can be hard to walk the line between offering healthy, diverse foods and offering selections that most students will eat on any given day. Umatilla School District has been doing tastings with children at OSU extension service programs and that has helped, she said.

Berdan said he hoped participants in the day's training came away with new ideas for next year's lunch and breakfast menus.

"We're really focused on building culinary skills and culinary confidence," he said.

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