

Middle schoolers go head to head in friendly cook-off

Event held as part of 4-H After-school Cooking Program

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Six middle school students, comprising three teams, clashed in the kitchen for a friendly cook-off that exhibited and tested their skills through making stir-fry and smoothies.

The competition, held at the Seaside High School culinary arts room April 22, was the finale of a four-week 4-H After-school Cooking Program. The free program, hosted by the Oregon State University Extension Service, is put on every year in Seaside for sixth- through eighth-graders, and students don't have to be involved with the larger Clatsop County 4-H Club to participate.

"What we're trying to teach the kids is kitchen safety, chopping skills and to not be afraid to try new things and just to be creative in the kitchen," said Sandra Carlson, the 4-H coordinator for Clatsop County.

The program always culminates in a cook-off, held the fourth and final week. During the three preceding weeks, the students learned chopping skills by making quesadillas, salsa and guacamole; were instructed in making bread dough for pizzas; and practiced their cook-off dishes. The recipes vary from year to year, but the fundamental principles being taught often remain the same, Carlson said.

Previously the program was held at the Bob Chisholm Community Center, but because the space also was being used for other programs — which was not ideal for either group — the program was moved to the high school this year, Carlson said.

"We're extremely thankful to be able to use this space," she added.

For the competition, the teams had to make a stir-fry, rice and smoothie or infused water — although all the teams chose to make smoothies this time. Each team was required to use a different stir-fry recipe that they pre-selected, and it had to contain three to five chopped vegetables.

Team Anonymous, which included seventh-grader Kara Spell and eighth-grader Cori Biamont, cooked a pork pineapple stir-fry and made a strawberry smoothie with pineapple.



Eighth-grader Madelynn Brown serves a panel of judges plates of stir fry for them to taste and evaluate during a cook-off held as part of the 4-H After-school Cooking Program. Brown and her teammate, Dalton Smith (not pictured), made a Thai curry dish with pork, along with a banana vanilla smoothie.

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Seventh-graders Briana Fraley, left, and Kayla Vowels made up team Vegetarian Vampires for the 4-H After-school Cooking Program cook-off held April 22 at the Seaside High School culinary arts room. The cook-off was the finale of a four-week long program put on by the Oregon State University Extension Service.

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Seventh-graders Kayla Vowels and Briana Fraley, the Vegetarian Vampires, made a spicy chicken stir-fry and a banana smoothie using a sugar substitute.

Lastly, eighth-graders Dalton Smith and Madelynn Brown, the No Brainers team, made a Thai curry pork stir-fry and banana vanilla smoothie.

The judges evaluated the teams on etiquette, creativity and teamwork while they were cooking and then

judged the dishes for presentation, texture and flavor. The judges consisted of Tita Montero, a city councilor and the Seaside Downtown Development Association executive director; Darren Gooch, Sunset Empire Park & Recreation District IT and marketing manager; Rod Nichols, a North Coast Food Web board member; Mary Gaffrey, who formerly worked in food service in the Astoria School District; and Mary Blake, a Master

Gardner and North Coast Food Web board member. Some of the judges were repeats, while others volunteered their services for the first time.

"I've always wanted to be a judge on a cooking show," said Montero, one of the first-timers, adding she now had been given a similar opportunity.

Blake expressed specific appreciation for a program that teaches children to cook. "To experience kids pre-



Eighth-grader Dalton Smith cooks meat for a stir fry during a cook-off held as part of the 4-H After-school Cooking Program on April 22. Smith teamed up with Madelynn Brown (not pictured) and the judges determined the No Brainers, as they called themselves, excelled in the area of flavor and texture for their dish and drink.

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paring food for themselves and also for other people is a real, real privilege," she said.

The judges determined team Anonymous excelled in the areas of kitchen etiquette and teamwork; the No Brainers placed first for the texture and flavor of their food; and the Vegetarian Vampires were noted for their delicious smoothie flavor and exceptional presentation. They each were given a gift bag from the OSU Extension Service.

4-H Program Assistant Jared Delay and volunteers Katie Paaso and Michael Hinton were on site to monitor the students.

Paaso, who has been involved with 4-H for 37 years, had a simple answer to why she's stuck with it so long: "the kids."

"When you look at them and you think, 'this is our future,' ... then you think, 'we're not going to be half bad, after all,'" she said.

Seaside School District to implement college savings awareness program

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

The Seaside School District is one of five districts to pilot a state program to raise awareness about the benefit of families getting a head start on college savings.

The Oregon College Savings Plan, which is part of the Oregon 529 College Savings Network, announced the Be College Ready program just recently. The program will kick off in September.

"We really want to foster a college-going culture in our state and we want to make sure that every kid who wants to should have the opportunity to go regardless of money, or family situation or anything else," said Michael Parker, executive director of the Oregon 529 College Savings Network. "We want every kid to know that they can be college ready, regardless of their situation."

The Oregon College Savings Plan chose Seaside School District because the group was looking for geographic diversity and varying district sizes when piloting the Be College Ready program. Also, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators suggested Seaside would embrace the program, Parker said.

"It's awesome that Sea-

side's going to be a pilot, and it doesn't really surprise me because we are very receptive to anything that helps the kids," said Angela Fairless, a member of Seaside Heights' Parent-Teacher Organization.

With both Seaside Heights and Gearhart elementary schools participating, the program will impact more than 700 students.

"Parents sort of get the idea of college savings at that kindergarten age when they're dropping their kids off for the first time. There's something that sort of clicks in," Parker said. "Our goal is, if that doesn't click in, if you hear about it at your school, it's going to click in. So that's why the elementaries are so important to us at this time."

The state's goal with the 529 program, Parker said, is to have compound interest working for people rather than against them. A family can save about \$35,000 by putting aside \$200 per month for 10 years at a 7 percent rate of return, earning approximately an extra \$11,000 in interest. In contrast, borrowing \$35,000 at a 6.8 percent interest rate and paying it off over 10 years equals \$400 per month.

The program starts by schools becoming certified as 529 College Savings

Schools. To become certified, the school must share information about the Oregon College Savings Plan on its website, have savings plan materials available in the main office, share monthly updates with students and parents and host an informational session about college funding for parents and the local community.

The schools, in return, will receive homework folders, pencils, pens, book-marks and posters each year. In the first year, each school also will receive a \$529 donation to its predetermined classroom fund and a 529 school certificate. The 529 designation is meant to be a reminder to save for college.

"It's good to give parents and students a goal for the future beyond elementary school, high school," Gearhart Elementary School Principal Juli Wozniak said. "When we have a goal, sometimes we make different choices, positive choices."

Fairless agreed. "When we visualize ourselves doing something, when we think we can do it, when we talk about doing it, it becomes much more possible and likely to happen," she said.

The program will involve educating parents about how to plan for future college expenses, motivating kids with

classroom materials and partnering with local business and civic organizations to reinforce the message that it's important to save for college as early as possible.

What that means for Seaside is "we're going to work with everybody," Parker said. "It's not just going to be a school-based event. We want the community to be involved as well."

"It's totally nonideological, it's totally nonpartisan; people just see the benefit," said John Valley, the outreach director of Oregon 529 College Savings Network.

In addition to Seaside, the Be College Ready will be piloted in the Hermiston, Grants Pass, McMinnville and North Clackamas school districts. The goal is to expand the kindergarten through fifth-grade program every year and ultimately offer it to every school district statewide.

"We do also want to make sure we touch base with those parents of older kids who can get information from us regarding financial aid and scholarship opportunities," Parker said.

For more information about the Oregon College Savings Plan, visit www.OregonCollegeSavings.com, call 866-772-8464, or go the program's Facebook page.

SHS marks Earth Day



Seaside High School students collect garbage around the high school campus for Earth Day, and finished the school day by planting a cherry blossom tree. Senior photographer Whitney McQuilliams recorded the event for posterity.