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5 Things to read today



Healthy Eating 101

The Healthy Eating Decisions program aims to get students in the county's elementary schools to make healthier food choices. **PAGE C1**

STARTING SCHOOL RIGHT



SUBMITTED BY WOFFORD COLLEGE

Wofford College psychology professor David Pittman talks with Jesse Boyd Elementary School students about healthy eating habits last year. The healthy diet efforts will continue this year at many schools.

Operation Backpack supplies 150 kids

By LYNNE P. SHACKLEFORD
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About 150 children from homeless or low-income households received much-needed school supplies and life lessons Saturday afternoon.

The afternoon was filled with speakers, prayer and entertainment as families assisted by Kingdom Outreach — a nondenominational ministry in downtown Spartanburg — gathered at the Spartanburg County Library Headquarters.

Natalie Davis, director of Kingdom Outreach, said for Operation Backpack, the agency partnered with the United Way, churches, restaurants and businesses to provide backpacks filled with supplies the children would need to start school on Monday.

The agency invited 88 families to Saturday's event based on need and income.

John Owings said he and his wife are without jobs. The family lives in a camper.

"Without (the camper), we'd be homeless," Owings said. The Owingses have three children — ages 6, 8 and 10 — and the family had no idea how they were going to pay for school supplies.

"The kids are going back to school

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Districts embrace healthy eating program

By LEE G. HEALY
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Even the youngest students might know fresh fruit is healthier than macaroni and cheese, but knowing the nutritional facts in the average school lunch can be tricky. That's where the Healthy Eating Decisions program comes in.

After a successful pilot run at two Spartanburg schools last year, the program now is being offered to all 40 elementary schools throughout the county, hopefully to inspire students to make healthier food choices.

So far, all nine District 6 elementary schools have signed on for the free program, as have most District 7 schools and Clifdale Elementary in District 3. Program organizers are optimistic more area schools will agree to participate as

the school year gets under way.

Healthy Eating Decisions is a collaboration between the psychology departments at Wofford College and University of South Carolina Upstate, led by Wofford psychology professor David Pittman and USC Upstate psychology professor Jennifer Parker. It is meant to combat the surge in childhood obesity rates, and promote lifelong healthy habits.

According to research from the Spartanburg County Childhood Obesity Task Force, more than 34 percent of Spartanburg County elementary students are either overweight or obese.

Under the program, a registered dietician analyzes daily school lunch menus and identifies the healthiest entree and side items. Students

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EATING

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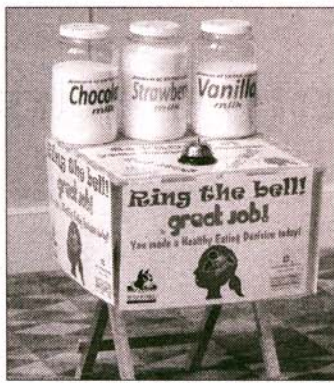
also are encouraged to drink white milk instead of sugary flavored milks.

Spartanburg County school districts that contract with Chartwell's for food services will serve the healthier meals beginning at the start of the school year.

On Monday, for example, the healthy meal of the chicken salad plate with crackers, fresh red grapes, lettuce and tomato salad and white milk contains 506 calories and 13.76 grams of fat.

"When students choose the healthy meal, they're allowed to ring a call bell in the cafeteria," Pittman explained. "That moment of attention they get by ringing that bell instills a sense of pride for making a healthy choice and reminds the other students they, too, have the opportunity to make a healthy choice. And the school values that."

Results from pilot schools Jesse Boyd and Mary H. Wright elementary schools in



SUBMITTED BY WOFFORD COLLEGE

Students who make healthy choices can ring the bell supplied by the Healthy Eating Decisions program.

District 7 last year revealed that at least 60 percent of students opted for white milk after participating in Healthy Eating Decisions, compared with only 20 percent choosing white milk before the program. Pittman said organizers also saw the percentage of students choosing the healthiest meal increase from less than 5 to more than 40.

"I think it's a really good program. It's sustainable over a long time. It's cost-free, and

it's effective," Pittman said. "We're focusing right now on elementary schools because if we can teach our children coming in as elementary students this year ... by the time they go to middle school, they will have a strong foundation in making healthy choices."

Using grant funds from the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project and Spartanburg Regional Foundation, participating schools will receive kits to kick off the program. Kits include a display table with informational posters, signs, a bell and three jars representing the amount of extra sugar students will consume in one school year by drinking chocolate, strawberry and vanilla milk versus 2 percent white milk. The jars contain 5 to 8 pounds of sugar.

Grant funds also were used to create instructional and educational videos explaining the program and an upgraded website, healthyeatingdecisions.com. The site contains healthy eating resources and links to school menus that identify the healthy meals

for each day and nutritional information.

"We are very, very excited about the opportunity to work with parents and the community to develop healthy habits and lifestyles for our children," said Donna Gutshall, District 6 assistant superintendent for instruction. "This is a lifelong thing for (students), and most of the things that last are the things that happen early in their lives."

West View Elementary Principal Shawn Wootton said the program will be a welcome extension of existing health-conscious initiatives at the school. Healthy lunch items already are discussed on the school's morning news program. Wootton said school leaders are talking about expanding upon the Healthy Eating Decisions program by putting a visual incentive, such as marbles in a jar, beside the cafeteria bell.

"Most importantly, I hope they're going to be educated on the choices they make and know the impact they have on themselves in terms of their healthy lifestyle," she said.