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Lessons in healthy lifestyles



CRISTA JEREMIASON / THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Patty Guzman, 11, helps her sister Esme Guzman, 3, on Monday with writing her name for a tag to put on a pot she planted with lettuce seeds as part of the Redwood Empire Food Bank summer lunch program at the Canyon Run Apartments in Healdsburg.

By **KERRY BENEFIELD**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Monday, June 28, 2010 at 5:57 p.m.
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Patty Guzman has watched her father grow vegetables at a community garden, but beginning this week, the 11-year-old is planning to give him a run for his money as a green thumb.

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"I like doing the garden because I like planting stuff," the 11-year-old from Healdsburg said as she worked the soil over freshly planted lettuce seeds.

She can taste the difference between her father's homegrown veggies and those the family buys at the store, she said.

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“The ones that he grows taste better,” she said.

Guzman is getting a shot at raising her own food — lettuce, tomatoes, cilantro, peppers — through a summer program called Power Up Your Summer.

Sponsored by Network for a Healthy California and the Redwood Empire Food Bank, the program combines service of breakfast and lunch to low income children with tutorials on gardening and promotion of exercise.

The program targets kids in low income families through Boys and Girls Clubs, parks and recreation departments, community centers and apartment complexes.

Children are invited to have a free lunch, as well as breakfast in some locations, while getting garden and exercise journals to monitor growth of their vegetables and their physical activity for the week.

The program targets students who qualify for free and reduced lunch during the school year but who might not have access to a healthful array of foods during the summer months.

In 2008-09, more than 51 percent, or 3.2 million, of California's school children were enrolled in the state's free and reduced meal program, according to the state Department of Education. But only 481,000 children took part in summer meal programs.

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CHP officers Monday night arrested five people for separate cases of driving drunk or under the influence of drugs, including high levels of intoxication and crashes, the CHP reported Tuesday.



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In Sonoma County, lunch will be served at 41 locations throughout the summer. It's the largest lunch service effort in seven years, said Jill Barron, the food banks community programs coordinator.

Last year, more than 75,800 meals were served at 35 sites in Sonoma County.

"We are trying to expand the site numbers," Barron said. "There is definitely more need and there are more cutbacks with programming and summer school."

The gardening program is supported by a \$50,000 grant from the food giant, ConAgra Foods.

"When they get out of the school structure and out on their own and the parents are working and kids are home, we have found that a lot of them are doing screen time — watching TV or talking on the phone," said Deb Harris, regional coordinator for the Network for a Healthy California's Children's Power Play campaign.

Adding the gardening component and exercise logs are aimed at getting more kids to take part and give the food program a broader emphasis on healthy lifestyles, Harris said.

"They are tracking their minutes of play during the summer and then celebrating that," Harris said.

At the Cloverdale Boys and Girls Club, that means at least 30 minutes of dancing a day in addition to a daily kitchen program to promote healthy eating.

"We give their mouth something to chew on and their hands something to do," said Lorinda Trujillo-Couture, director of program development at the Cloverdale Boys and Girls Club.

"We're trying to introduce different ways to eat, 'Do you think you can do this by yourself at home: peanut butter on celery with ants on top with raisins?'"



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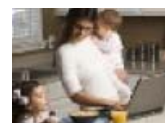
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Without the structure of school lunch programs and a regular physical education program, many students will while away their summer in front of the television or computer monitor, eating food that is easy but not necessarily healthful, said Trujillo-Couture.

“Heavy junk food and little to no exercise, video games,” she said. “A lot of them live in small living quarters and if they are lucky, when somebody gets home from work they will take them out and ride a bike — possibly.”

In Healdsburg, about 22 kids on Monday were served boxed lunches of burritos, cantaloupe, salsa, chips, milk, carrots and cucumber slices at an housing complex on the north side of town.

Students, some who walk more than a mile every day with a neighbor, were then invited to plant their own lettuce. Next week, the Redwood Empire Food Bank's garden coordinator, Mike Siegal, will have the children planting peppers, tomatoes, cilantro and chives in large pots they will tend at home.

By the end of summer, the students will make their own salads and salsa, he said.

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