

KIWI CLASS LEADERS: *A spotlight on inspiring and successful school food programs.*

WALNUT CREEK WELLNESS CITY CHALLENGE

When a whole community jumps on the wellness wagon, it's bound for positive change. Welcome to Walnut Creek, California, where a dynamo named Cindy Gershen initiated the Wellness City Challenge, an initiative that is working to bring programs for nutrition and exercise to the city. A restaurant owner who lost 95 pounds and has kept them off, Gershen believes restaurants should lead the way in healthy eating. Even as she banished trans fat, hydrogenated oil, high fructose corn syrup and processed food from her own diet, Gershen also eliminated them from her eatery, Sunrise Bistro. Now she is trying to change the menu for an entire city.



Snagging \$5,000 from Kaiser Medical, Gershen started a walking program for elementary school students in Walnut Creek. Next, with the help of food manufacturer Kashi, she tackled nutrition during the high school exam weeks. Healthy fare takes the place of donuts in a breakfast program called "Finals Fuel."

Doris Eaton, a private K-8 school of 320 students in Walnut Creek has no kitchen, so lunch has to be catered. But outside suppliers didn't deliver on nutrition, until Gershen. In fall 2006, she landed a contract to cook lunch in her Sunrise Bistro—conveniently around the corner—

and bring it to the school. Now, menus go home every week and kids can choose either a hot entrée or a soup and sandwich combo. The cost? Same as the previous provider. The difference? More wholesome and nutritious meals.

Gershen cooks from scratch and uses "clean food"—no white sugar or rice, no high fructose corn syrup and no partially hydrogenated oils. Kids love her whole wheat mac 'n' cheese and barbecue chicken with homemade sauce and baked potatoes.

Elsewhere in Walnut Creek, five public elementary schools and one junior high share a central kitchen, and Gershen's goal is to create a similar lunch system there. Right now, she's creating a year's worth of menus, based on her work at Doris Eaton, for these schools to use. She hopes that the new healthy-food program will be implemented during the 2007-08 academic year.

Use these tips to modify eating choices in your home or at your child's school.

- If nothing else, eliminate hydrogenated oils and high fructose corn syrup.
- Hide the healthy ketchup (no added sugar) in a brand-name bottle—you'll totally fool the kids.
- Keep serving the brown—kids may complain, but soon they will happily eat brown rice and whole wheat bread and pasta.
- Sit down together. Doris Eaton teachers don't pay for their meals when they eat with students. They're building community—and teaching table manners, too.

—Anne Ficklen



ANNOUNCING THE KIWI CRUSADERS AWARD

Celebrating excellence in school meals.

Many news stories talk about what's wrong with school food programs—here at KIWI, we like to talk about what's right. We know that these positive stories will inspire other schools to follow suit—giving them insight into how they can be successful in making nutrition a priority. In addition to our "Class Leaders" column, which profiles healthy food programs, we're launching our first annual Kiwi Crusaders Awards, marking excellence in school meals. Sponsored by KIWI and FruitaBü Organic Smooshed Fruit, we're asking our readers to nominate schools, which have made a commitment to serving students healthy foods.

We'll be recognizing healthy school food programs from public and private pre-K, primary and secondary schools. For more information and to enter your school, visit www.kiwimagonline.com or www.fruitabu.com.