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Yuma school nutrition programs are ahead of the times

YUMA, ARIZONA- Yuma has long been known as the vegetable capital of the world. Thousands of acres of leafy greens and assorted vegetables have been growing and sustaining this community for years. Jane Johnson, School Nutrition Director of Crane Elementary District reflects on her experiences with Yuma school food service, "I think we were ahead of the times by establishing a fruit and veggie bar back in the early '90's. Who knew back then that there would be a mandate for fruits and vegetables?"

New mandates by USDA include more fruits and vegetables for the students and the Yuma schools are on board to meet the new challenge. Starting this fall, the mandates will change the way they are serving fruits and vegetables. Prior to this year, students had a choice of whether to choose, but now they have to choose fruits and vegetables.

Karen Johnson, Director of Yuma School District One's Child Nutrition Program stated, "When USDA changed the meal pattern this year to mandate fruits/vegetables on the plate we were ready for the challenge, but really we have been offering fresh fruit and vegetables to our students for a long time. The fruit and veggie bar offers the opportunity for students to serve themselves and take as much as they want."

The powerhouse team of nutrition experts in Yuma schools are impressive. Both teams (Yuma District One Elementary District and Crane Elementary District) are extremely passionate about feeding children at school. It has become a lifelong mission to see that they are offered affordable meals. The clichés about a hungry child not being able to learn are so very true and real and elevate the pride and commitment of each team member.

The team is involved in many local, regional and national associations including the School Nutrition Association; the Arizona Association of School Business Officials; and many more. The various organizations they belong to offer each the opportunity to share Yuma's success stories and learn more about program opportunities available to them.

Lisa Thrower is the nutrition educator for Yuma School District One. She attended Yuma School District One and Yuma Union High School District. Nutrition made a direct impact on her life and became a career dream for her. She now has a B.S. Degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management from NAU with an emphasis in Nutrition and Food Safety. Lisa also has a Masters

Degree in educational leadership. Lisa grew up in an agriculture family so fruits and vegetables were always plentiful at their family dinner table. “Our department has been working hard to meet all the required mandates that the USDA and the Arizona Department of Education have provided to us. It seems the increase of fruits and vegetables mandate will make a positive impact on our students,” stated Thrower.

The nutrition team shares their feelings about the POWER PLAY’te program in their cafeterias. Thrower enthused, “I feel that the POWER PLAY’te program will help educate the students about the choices they are already making. It is a win-win situation for our students, and our community to have the play’tes. It will add excitement to the cafeterias by creating a positive and colorful environment to our campuses.”

“Partnering with the POWER PLAY’te project and the JV Smith Companies is a wonderful opportunity for our schools. It couldn’t have come at a better time. What a way to kick off a new school year!” stated Jane Johnson.

Karen Johnson agrees, “We have a perfect storm- a perfect combination was created and we merged our efforts to not only make fruits/vegetables fun for students but educational as well. We are excited about having a marketing team on board that is spreading the message to students that fruits and vegetables are critical to a healthy lifestyle.”

The perfect storm starts and ends with the school nutrition experts who will continue their hard work and commitment to keeping Yuma students on the right path.

Want more information? Visit www.limelightcreativegroup.com or call Sheppard at 928-246-9108 or Sternitzke at 928-246-9255.

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