

Story for Village Life newspaper, El Dorado Hills

Story: MERCY, SILVA VALLEY WELLNESS NIGHT APRIL 13 (2 pages)

Linda Holderness
677 Hillswick Circle
Folsom CA 95630
916-983-1388
lholderness@sbcglobal.net

The health tips came with a few surprises at the Silva Valley Elementary School Family Wellness Night April 13.

The students discovered healthier living can be fun. Everyone learned even yummy foods can be nutritious. A third surprise was more serious: Beware how you quench your thirst.

The event, two hours of health and fitness information for families, was sponsored by a partnership between Mercy Hospital of Folsom's Growing Well With Mercy program and the Silva Valley PTA. Growing Well With Mercy collaborates with schools in Mercy Folsom's service area – Rancho Cordova, Folsom and El Dorado Hills – to teach students, their families and teachers how to incorporate better food choices and more movement into their lives.

The push, said Jan Wilcox, Mercy Folsom community outreach specialist, who heads the program, was the sharp increase in number of young people who are obese or have type 2 diabetes. These problems can often be prevented or even reversed with healthier lifestyle choices, Wilcox said.

"If we could just get people to make small changes," she said. "They don't even have to be big changes. Small changes add up."

The event drew 50 to 70 people, Wilcox estimated, "a pretty good turnout for our first time here."

The most crowded table in the school's multipurpose room appeared to be Theresa Miller's "Sneaky Treats." Miller, the PTA historian, assisted by her 10-year-old son, Davey, laid out five trays piled with homemade cookies and brownies.

"I warned the kids there was something magic in them," she said.

After getting rave reviews, Miller pulled secret ingredients out of a shopping bag: the richest brownies contained spinach and carrots; another had black beans; the chocolate chip cookies had garbanzo beans; another cookie contained lentils; the blueberry bars had spinach. Miller found the recipes on the Internet.

Nicholas Pham, 12, raved about his favorite – the black-bean brownies. Margaret Koldinger, also 12, loved the blueberry bars even after knowing they contained spinach. She couldn't taste it, she said.

Miller was delighted. "If anybody will tell you the truth," she said, "it will be a kid."

At another station, sponsored by Whole Foods Kids in the Kitchen, Cooking Coach Cindy Soltesz and her helper, 10-year-old Jack Dillard, prepared a baked quinoa ratatouille, low fat and filled with vegetables. The audience of kids in tall chef's hats scarfed it down.

Victoria Berends raised everyone's awareness of sugar consumption with her visual demonstration of the sugar content in favorite drinks: equivalent piles of sugar cubes in front of each beverage. Excess sugar has been implicated in obesity and diabetes, Berends said.

A surprise was the amount in a 20-ounce bottle of a favorite sports drink: nine teaspoons.

Parents mistakenly think sports drinks are healthy, said Berends, a parent volunteer who has a public health background, but they contain a lot of sugar. In most cases, she said, "water is better for hydration."

To balance eating with activity, the event included fun movement. Licensed Zumba instructor Carol Allotey led stomping Zumba sessions that had everyone, even a few adults, marching and twirling.

First-grader Tyler Dillard loved Zumba because "you get to dance and get to do really fun moves."

Even the yoga class was peppy. Andrea Shaw, founder of Om Kidz Yoga in Folsom, paced youngsters briskly through the moves.

At the end of the two hours, kids were vowing they'd change their health habits.

"I'm definitely going to eat more healthy stuff," third-grader Paige Machon said.

"I'm giving up soda," declared Tyler Dillard.

A mother pledged to substitute "sneaky" brownies for cupcakes at her next children's party.

At the end of the evening, Sharon Thompson, PTA co-chairwoman, was pleased. "I think we've educated a lot of parents and kids tonight," she said.

#####