

DISPATCHES

Chatham's star chefs create school lunches

On Leap Day, Chef Colin Bedford gazed at a table full of ingredients ranging from canned cling peaches and whole grain pasta, to local sweet potatoes and fresh spinach in efforts to plan a delicious, healthy meal. He was not designing a menu for his Chatham County restaurant, The Ferrington House, but a new lunch menu for the more than 8,000 youth of Chatham County Public Schools.

The Abundance Foundation's annual Chatham Chef Challenge brings high-profile chefs into schools to help create healthier school lunches in Chatham County Schools. The purpose of the Chef Challenge is to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by students in grades pre K-12 while supporting GAP-certified local farms when possible. This project also works toward the Abundance Foundation's mission of bringing greater education and access to local food to all families.

This year, the Chef Challenge consists of four Chefs: Chef Colin Bedford of Ferrington, Chef Jay Pierce of Lucky 32, Chef Gregg Hamm of CCCC Natural Chef program, and the cafeteria managers of some schools.

In partnership with the Chatham County Schools, Briar Chapel, Debbie McKenzie of the Southeast United Dairy Association, a team of committed community members and CCCC's Natural Chef Program, Chatham County School lunches are going through transformation.

Each chef or team is assigned a box of ingredients to create their recipe for a healthier school lunch. The menus designed by the chefs must be easy for the school cafeteria lunch teams to create and abide by the USDA requirements for the school lunch program. Each chef partners with cafeteria managers, cafeteria staff, teachers and principals to bring greater awareness to each school this spring. The four recipes are cooked by the staff and served to the students in all 17 Chatham County Public Schools on the Chef Challenge Days, which are April 19, April 26, May 3, and May 10. Cafeteria Managers and Cafeteria Staff are extremely generous for volunteering their time to learn the new recipes designed by each of the four chefs. The organization of Chatham Chef Challenge could not be done without the help of the dedicated team of superstar volunteers.

On Chef Challenge Days, over 8,000 students have the opportunity to try the new lunch created by a superstar Chef with fresh and local ingredients. The students



Chef Gregg Hamm (left) and Chef Jay Pierce with team members.

then take a survey to assess the Chef's lunch. The recipes liked most by students permanently stay in rotation on the County's school lunch menu.

Leading up to Chef Challenge Days, during the month of March the chefs met with the Cafeteria Managers and staff for Training Day on their newly created recipes. The chefs and farmers also visited schools that choose to hold Chef Challenge Assembly. These school assemblies offer students the chance to meet the chefs and the farmers and understand where their food came from and how their meals were created.

Last year, the Chatham County Chef Challenge included Chef Colin Bedford of Ferrington, Chef Gregg Hamm of the CCCC Natural Chef Program, and Chef Jimmy Reale of Carolina Crossroads. Their menus featured three-cheese pasta and vegetables, orange zest chicken, seasoned carrots and green beans, and fresh salads. Desserts included fruit parfaits, strawberries and bananas drizzled with chocolate sauce, and low-fat chocolate cake with spinach inside, topped with fresh strawberry sauce.

Over three consecutive days in April, cafeteria staff across the county prepared the Chefs' new lunch recipes, bringing 5,800 fresh, healthy school lunches to students. While going through the lunch lines, students tended to choose the chefs' meals 4 to 1 over the competing typical school lunch. About 80 percent of students preferred the Chefs' meals when competing against chicken nuggets, pizza, and nachos with cheese.

Since last year was the first ever Chatham Chef Challenge, this year we hope the project makes an even greater impact. To compliment the Chef Challenge with more learning opportunities for students and parents, teachers in all 17 schools will facilitate complementary classroom lessons promoting physical exercise and making healthier food choices. Also this year, local sweet potato farmer, Chester Pilson of C.V. Pilson Farm in Moore County, is providing all the sweet potatoes for Chef Challenge. His sweet potatoes are GAP certified, a status farms must attain in order to source produce to schools.

It is amazing how many folks work to make Chef Challenge a meaningful success; all 17 public schools participate in the 12-week Chef Challenge, as well as local "celebrity" chefs, farmers, all cafeteria staff, the PTA, principals, local farmers, the area USDA nutrition director, and Dairy Council director work together to bring healthier, fresher school lunches to students.

In addition to learning more about what foods our kids are being served, everyone learns something new about the USDA, what it's like to work in a public school cafeteria, and how the Chatham PTA is working to improve the health and fitness of its youth. Onward and upward, always!

Chatham Chef Challenge is a critical piece to The Abundance Foundation's mission to educate youth and adults on local food, sustainable agriculture, and increase access to education and consumption of local food.

— Jenny Schnaak, The Abundance Foundation

CCCC-Chatham celebrates it's 50th with a party for all

Central Carolina Community College hosts a day of fun, entertainment, and learning April 28 at its Chatham County Campus. The event is part of the college's on-going 2011-12 celebration of 50 years of service to its communities.

Everyone is invited to this celebration overflowing with free activities: entertainment, health screenings, classes, law enforcement demonstration, barbering and cosmetology services, and more. There will also be a tour of the college's sustainable features, from its Student Land Lab to its green buildings. The JobLink Career Center will be open during the event to show visitors the services it offers.

Admission and events are free, except for the food vendors, 5K Rabbit Run and Children's Fun Run registration, and the Comedy Dinner Theatre.

The college opened its doors as the Lee County Industrial Education Center in 1961. It expanded into Chatham County in 1964 and Harnett County in 1965. From those small beginnings, CCCC now serves residents of its three-county service area, as well as many from other counties, through

three campuses, seven centers, several locations dedicated to specific programs, and other class locations.

"We invite residents of Chatham and surrounding counties to join us on this special day," said CCCC President Bud Marchant. "We have been an integral part of our communities for all these years and want everyone to be part of the celebration."

The day kicks off at the campus, 764 West St., Pittsboro with a flag raising by a color guard at 7:45 a.m. The 5K race starts at 8 a.m. and the Kids' Fun Run, at 9 a.m. All-day events run from 9 a.m.–1 p.m., while some activities, such as classes, are scheduled at specific times.

Classes include culinary arts, agriculture, and pottery, and there will be a demonstration of Chinese calligraphy. Bring the children to enjoy a bounce house, story telling, face painting, caricatures, a ride in a hot air balloon, and more.

For a full events schedule, as well as registration for the races, go to www.cccc.edu/50years/events. Information about the races is also available by calling CCCC Foundation Associate Director Emily Hare at

919.718.7230 or email at ehare@ccc.edu.

The college's 50th Anniversary Chatham Celebration will be topped off by Comedy Dinner Theatre performances at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. in the Holmes Meeting Room of the Chatham Community Library, located on the college's campus.

CCCC Communication and Theater instructor Ellen Bland and CCCC Hospitality and Culinary Program director Chef Gregg Hamm direct the college's acting and culinary arts students in presenting this triple treat: a three-course meal and three short comedies.

Seating is limited for the Comedy Dinner Theatre and advance ticket purchase is required. Tickets are \$16 and are available at www.brownpapertickets.com or at the college's Administration Office, Building 1, on the Chatham Campus.

"The Chatham Campus is a hub of community activity year-round," said Laura Lauffer, CCCC Sustainability coordinator and chair for the Chatham Celebration. "We enjoy seeing families use the walking trail and community library, young and not so young attending a variety of classes, and the smiling faces of our graduates. This

celebration is our way of saying thank you to Chatham County for being such a wonderful part of our college community. Come and enjoy a day of fun for the whole family as we celebrate our anniversary."

— Katherine E. McDonald,
Marketing Writer for CCCC

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Chatham County Line is a community newspaper serving all of Chatham County as well as the southern part of Orange. Our mission is to inform our community by providing a forum "where all voices are heard." We seek all views and ideas about our community, and we report on important matters — including our cultural life — comprehensively and in-depth. Our commitment is to create the best-written, best-edited and most stylish community newspaper anywhere.

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