

Community and Lifestyles**Junk still winning out over healthy food**

by Nadin Naumann

Stand in line at the State College High School cafeteria and watch the students as they make their lunchtime food selections. While they have an array of options to choose from, what ends up on the trays are pizza, fries or grilled cheese, and what ends up left behind are apples, salads and sandwiches.

Kids and young adults today are less likely to choose a healthy meal. According to the Public Health Advocacy Institute (PHAI), food companies spend about \$15 billion per year on child-targeted advertising in order to make sure it stays that way.

Young people today are bombarded with marketing everywhere they go. They hear advertisements on the radio or see them on T.V., on the Internet and in magazines. Increasingly, they are also exposed to advertising on school buses and even in the classroom through news programs produced for schools.

The PHAI states that marketers are trying to establish brand loyalty from birth. They use licensed TV and film characters such as Dora the Explorer, Blues Clues and SpongeBob Squarepants to help sell everything from greasy fast food to less-than-healthy store-bought selections. The indus-

try has developed games and toys for children to help sway them into choosing their product. There is Coca-Cola Barbie, McDonald's Play-Doh and books such as the M&M's Counting Book. These are just a few examples of junk food advertisements in disguise.

State College Area School District Food Manager Megan Schaper has been working with food services in the area for about 15 years. She said there is definitely a correlation between advertising and kids' food choices.

A few years ago the high school was buying pizza from Pizza Hut, but that became very expensive. Schaper organized a blind taste test with brand-name pizzas and the school's pizza. The school's pizza actually ended up winning; however, students still wanted brand-name pizzas like Domino's and Pizza Hut in the end.

"It's a perfect example of how media has an impact on their food choices," said Schaper.

In 2007, a study was conducted by Stanford University with children in the Packard Children's Hospital. Children were asked to sample two identical foods from McDonald's. The study showed that children preferred the taste of the version branded with the restaurant's familiar

"Golden Arches" than from the one in unmarked paper packaging, even though the same fries were in both.

The study, led by associate professor of pediatrics Thomas Robinson, showed that even young children are swayed by brand preferences. Almost 77 percent thought that McDonald's fries served in a McDonald's bag tasted better, compared to 13 percent who liked the fries in a plain white bag. They also served carrots in a McDonald's bag and it had the same results.

The Healthy School Lunch Campaign, sponsored by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), is dedicated to improving the food in the U.S. school system. The campaign's key message is that foods served in schools should promote the health of all children.

Director of Nutrition Education of PCRM Susan Levine also said that media and marketing have a strong impact on the choices kids are making in school.

"It makes you wonder how the industry can stomach what their goals are, which is of course to make money at the extent of people's health," said Levine. "It's not going to be the industry who makes the decision to say I would rather kids be healthy than make money."

According to the 2008 PCRM's School



Photo provided
Children continue to choose name-brand foods with lower nutritional value over healthy options. Local and national experts say the media, including paid advertising and branding, are largely responsible for the trend.

see School food, pg. 11

Aging in Place survey finds transportation a priority

by Hannah Abelbeck

Senior citizens. They're here, and they're organizing.

A particularly dedicated group has been working for more than a year to put together a program called Aging in Place, which they hope will help seniors stay in their homes longer when otherwise minor problems become overwhelming.

Aging in Place conducted a survey of State College residents to see if local seniors would be interested in their service, and more than 200 replied. Sixty-five percent of respondents said they expected to need transportation services now or in the future, the highest percentage for any of the 14 services that the survey asked about,

Aging in Place would help seniors by vetting and organizing service providers for their minor needs, available with a single call to the organization.

which also included lawn care, home care, and health care. About half of the respondents thought they would need a majority of the services listed.

Especially as the cost of private care increases, seniors can save thousands by delaying a move to assisted living facilities. A commonly cited 1999 AARP survey found that nine in 10 of those 65 and over say they would like to stay where they are for as long as possible.

Fred Eisele, who raised interest in Aging in Place in the spring of 2008 with a workshop organized through Penn State's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, explained that the group would be a great help for seniors who are "slowing down." Arthritis, minor injuries or surgery, and even changes in the weather can make outdoor chores like removing leaves from gutters or indoor chores like scrubbing floors or moving boxes out of storage become time consum-

ing, if not painful or risky.

Many seniors don't have family in the area or don't feel comfortable repeatedly calling friends and neighbors for help. Instead of suffering in silence, Aging in Place would help them by vetting and organizing service providers for their minor needs, available with a single call to the organization.

Silvi Lawrence, a State College Borough Council Member active with the group, called it a "concierge service." Eisele called it a non-profit "buyer's club."

Half of the survey respondents said they'd be willing to pay \$50 or more per

see Aging survey, pg. 12

from School food, pg. 10

Lunch Report Card, menus in most school lunch programs are too high in saturated fat and cholesterol and too low in fiber- and nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables. PCRM dietitians analyzed elementary school lunches served by 20 school districts for the report.

"While they're in school is a prime time and opportunity to feed kids something healthy and educate them about what healthy food is for years and years to come," said Levine.

Levine also explained that children are bigger than they've ever been. Obesity is on the rise and it triples among some age groups because of the food they are eating.

"We never even referred to kids as obese back in the day," said Levine. "Now 2-year-olds are suffering from chronic diseases that were once only referred to for adults such as high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and

School food services are financed in large part by the purchases students make. If a food service offers healthy options students won't buy, it can put itself out of business. One local school is looking for a happy medium including options such as pizza with whole wheat crusts.

cholesterol."

The answer to solving this problem isn't as easy as some organizations are making it out to be, however. Schaper explained that there is a huge lack of funding in the school district that prohibits them from purchasing healthy foods year-round.

"The food is not funded like a class. It is funded by selling products to children," said Schaper. "The children are the customers and the food service runs like a business selling them what they want."

This poses difficulties for Schaper

because she would much rather give these children a healthier lunch, but if she served them tofu lasagna instead of pizza no one would buy it and there wouldn't be any money for food services.

"The money that these children use to pay for their foods goes directly to paying the staff, buying supplies, and more," said Levine. "If they started giving out foods that they probably wouldn't buy, then the funding wouldn't be there anymore."

Schaper is working on finding a good middle ground.

"A lot of schools are now serving pizza with a whole wheat crust," said Schaper. "We are looking to implement those same ideas in this school system."

Perhaps a little nudging and role modeling can also help young students choose a healthy meal for lunch.

At Ferguson Township Elementary School teachers stand at the end of the line helping students choose a melon or an apple as a side.

"You will rarely see a child without fruits or vegetables on their plate," said Schaper.

USDA Public Affairs Specialist Kim Phillips agreed that schools need to be able to offer more healthy choices. In addition, she stated that even though advertising has had a bad influence in the past on children maybe now they can turn around and have the opposite effect.

"Right now the media can be used as a positive tool to promote healthy school lunches," said Phillips. "More and more actors and actresses are coming on board and promoting healthier foods."

In July, actor Tobey Maguire sent letters to congressional leaders asking that the Child Nutrition Act provide more healthy vegetarian options in school lunches.

"I am deeply concerned that unhealthy school lunches are contributing to our nation's childhood obesity epidemic," wrote Maguire in the letters to Sen. Tom

Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. "My wife and I just had our second child, so this issue is tremendously important to us."

The government has already started to implement healthier choices in schools. The USDA is currently running a campaign called The Eat Smart Play Hard Campaign. It encourages and teaches children, parents and caregivers to eat healthy and be physically active every day.

In 2004, federal reauthorization of the National School Lunch Program mandated all schools to enact a wellness policy by July 1, 2006. The State College Area School District along with the other area school districts now carry a wellness policy that includes goals for nutritional education, physical activity and nutrition guidelines for all served foods.

Though there is still a Papa John's pizza day in some State College district schools, students are still being encouraged to choose a healthier option. On the lunch menu there are advertisements and cartoons promoting choosing a healthier lunch. One menu had a cartoon of a Santa stuck in a chimney stating, "For years, he'd been telling himself that the chimneys were getting skinnier, but he could no longer deny that he had A NASTY COOKIE HABIT!"

Will children ever choose a healthy sandwich over greasy pizza? Levine said she believes that one day they will, especially with the help of the government.

"The government has to step in and say you can't directly market to kids," said Levine. "Just like they have done with smoking and drug advertisements. You no longer see cartoons being used on smoking campaigns."

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ReUseIt offers second spin on Freecycle model

by Hannah Abelbeck

Move over Freecycle, there's a new gig in town. Jen Hecker of Port Matilda has started a local ReUseIt group for those in and near Centre County.

ReUseIt, like Freecycle, is a national network of local online forums where people post messages to advertise items they want to get rid of or to inquire about things people may want to give away. It acts as classified ad listings for free things—with an environmental twist. The goal of both groups is to keep objects out of landfills by getting them into the right hands—namely, someone who will use, reuse, or recycle them. Both YahooGroups have found success by acting on the dictum that, “Someone’s trash is someone’s else treas-

ure,” mediated by the Internet.

Center County Freecycle has been operating since July 2004 and has 2,745 subscribers. Throughout 2009 it has generated 500 to 700 messages a month. The organization hit a record of 976 messages in July of 2008, an accumulation of e-mails powerful enough to put a serious dent in an online inbox, even though Freecycle has carefully proscribed rules for posting, demanding clear subject lines and purposeful messages.

An example of one November message from a user named think_angel reads, “OFFER: Rusty Barbed Wire. We have a bit of it balled up (like tightly) and there’s yards and yards of it around the property. Some people use this for crafts or containing teenagers. *kidding on the latter*.”

Another by karlfuls says, “RECEIVED:

challenge. Driving is the most common mode of transportation for adults age 50 and older, according to the AARP’s 2002 Understanding Senior Transportation Survey.

But driving becomes more difficult with aging. The percentage of those who are licensed and who drive regularly declines slowly up to age 85, after which there is a substantial reduction in driving. After driving, those over 50 get around by ride sharing, and it is the usual mode of transportation for more than one-fifth of seniors 75 and older.

However, “feelings of dependency or concerns about imposing on others” mean that seniors feel constrained in their mobility. They also don’t replace car transporta-

Cub Scout Uniform (Pa Furnace). Many thanks.....I’m sewing the pack numbers on right now.”

Hecker created the Centre County ReUseIt in September. So far, the group has a much more leisurely pace, with only 30 members and 40 postings in October. Similar postings there offered “A queen oak headboard, footboard, mattress and box springs needing minor repairs,” and “Freezer burnt venison meat for dog food ONLY!”

The main difference between the two groups is that far more than Freecycle, ReUseIt emphasizes recycling as a community endeavor. While both groups want to keep stuff out of landfills, Hecker hopes ReUseIt can “Make connections between community members who want to help each

other, themselves, and their environment.”

To that end, ReUseIt groups also feature messages with recycling tips and recycling challenges to encourage community and get people to change their behavior. The most recent tip mentioned that old Crocs (rubber sandals) could be recycled.

“I discovered ReUseIt, read their goals and really liked how they operate... options are a wonderful thing!” said Hecker.

Subscribe to either group online at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CentreCountyPAREUseIt>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CentreCoPAFreecycle>

from Aging survey, pg. 10

month for the service.

While the needs of fresh-faced college students get a lot of attention in State College, a sizable number of community members reached the age of 18 more than 50 years ago. In fact, 10.2 percent of residents in the State College metropolitan area are 65 years and older, according to data from the 2008 American Community Survey. This proportion is only slightly smaller than the 10.6 percent of residents who are 25 to 34 years of age.

Mobility—whether going to the store, to community events, or to see friends—is very important for seniors. But it is also a

Silvi Lawrence became convinced of the need for the group after a double knee replacement made getting around and getting things done very complicated.

tion with other forms of transportation. Walking, public transportation, taxis, and community or senior vans provide primary transportation for only five percent of individuals age 50 and older.

Lawrence knows firsthand how difficult

simple tasks can become. She became convinced of the need for the group after a double knee replacement made getting around and getting things done very complicated, especially since her children don’t live near.

The group will be conducting a feasibility study to determine what they can provide, but they expect fees would be \$35 to \$50 per month. In addition, the group would also need to depend on help from volunteers.

The group’s next general meeting is 11 a.m. Dec. 7 in Room 241 of the State College Municipal Building, 243 S. Allen Street. They hope to introduce the group and discuss the survey results with those who might be interesting in participating.

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Interview with The Duke taught me a lesson

by Joel Solkoff

John Wayne once granted me a telephone interview on his experiences with cancer. For those readers too young to remember [a concept that defies imagination], John Wayne (nicknamed The Duke) was an Academy-Award winning actor who appeared in 142 movies. His cowboy and other macho roles served as an icon for my generation on how a real man is supposed to behave.

This is a column about fear. Miriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines fear as, "an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger." Fear "implies...loss of courage." I am familiar with the fear that comes from:

Having an oncologist look up from my pathology file and say, "There is no doubt about it. You have cancer."



*From
Where I Sit*

Sitting for hours in radiation waiting rooms as my fellow patients look at each other and wonder who will live and who will die.

Experiencing the side effects of radiation slowly burning my spine and resulting in the odd experience of standing at a jogging track ready to run (forcing myself to run) and being unable to do so.

Being unable to walk across a room without falling—I once fell in front of a prospective employer three times during a job interview.

I cannot go from my bed to the bathroom without transferring to a power chair. I know about courage and my lack of it,

about appropriate and inappropriate anger and the need to put my past behind me and be human—not a cripple; human. Here in my apartment in State College, I recognize my New Year's resolution must be to behave (to excuse the sexist expression) like a Man.

Twenty-one years ago I was an arrogant journalist writing an article for The New York Times on the emotional effects of surviving cancer. At the time, society was still pondering such questions as whether it was a good idea to tell patients that they had cancer. Doctors thought it prudent not to disclose likely side-effects. The newspapers, examining the statistics on cancer mortality, featured headlines on the failure of the War on Cancer. By doing so, the media had masked the remarkable progress being made especially among children and young adults. At a time when my mother

managers, he served as a spokesman for the American Cancer Society. His commercials, which featured a pitch for early detection, were model John Wayne sounding essentially like someone who would shoot you without pause if you did not immediately send a check, which many viewers did. Wendy warned, "You cannot tell him where you got this telephone number."

I dialed. John Wayne [JOHN WAYNE!] answers the phone and says, "Unless you tell me where you got my phone number, I am going to hang up on you." I turned in my editor without a moment's thought.

Two weeks after the doctors removed Wayne's lung, he was back at work making a movie. "I jumped into a river with handcuffs on in January...and that was tough. It kept me from developing a protection which I thought I needed but which I didn't need." I replied that my experiences with cancer left me with unresolved feelings that were getting in the way of living my life. He dismissed the idea that I should, as he put it, feel sorry for myself. John Wayne said, "The thing to do is just try your damndest without telling anyone else about it."

For its own reasons, The Times published my first draft which did not include the Wayne interview (making this a Voices exclusive). Less than a week later, I was on Good Morning America feeling sorry for myself for a brief moment of public acclaim. Less than a year later, Wayne died of stomach cancer. Today, I still remember his advice with reverence, despite the fact that I detested Wayne's politics. In February, I plan to discuss:

1. The wisdom of John Wayne
2. How to implement that wisdom here in Centre Country to help reduce fear among our disabled and aged population.

(Our community's considerable private and academic emotional counselors are invited.)

—Joel Solkoff, author of *The Politics of Food*. Contact him at jsolkoff@gmail.com



refused superstitiously to say the word cancer out loud, spelling it letter by letter, parents of cancer survivors had trouble conveying the reality that when a child has cancer it need not be a sentence of death.

I was not sufficiently savvy to realize that the vagaries of life were mirrored in the familiar vagaries of journalism. As I later learned, the chief editor of the Times' Magazine made it a practice to reject the first draft of every free-lancer. Wendy Moonan, my immediate editor, wanted my revision to include an interview with John Wayne. Wayne had lung cancer and since 1964, despite the objections of his business

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