

Leading the fight against childhood obesity

• ACS, OSU, AFHK unite for conference

THE AMERICAN Cancer Society, in partnership with The Ohio State University Extension of Belmont County and Ohio Action for Healthy Kids, recently sponsored the second annual Tools for Schools Cook's Conference at Union Local High School in to teach over 50 regional school cooks about improving nutrition in school lunches.

The conference included an introduction to school wellness, new ideas on how to save time and money, the importance of fiber, nutrition and safety updates, and available resources and tools. Highlights of the day included a food demonstration by professional chef, Bill Bird of Zandex Corporation, a yoga demonstration for job stress reduction by Nicole Buckley of Creating Balance and a food show by food distributor, Sysco.

American Cancer Society Health Promotions Coordinator Amy Magorien explained that healthy children more often turn into healthy adults. And school cooks often serve as gatekeepers for childhood nutrition.

"If we can teach our children to make healthy choices when they are young, their chance of becoming active, healthy adults increases," Magorien said.

Magorien said that the American Cancer Society has helped spearhead "Tools for



BILL BIRD of Zandex Corporation demonstrates healthy, appealing menu items for school cooks at the Tools for Schools Cook's Conference located at Union Local High School.

Photo Provided

Schools" because research has linked poor diets and sedentary lifestyles to increased cancer risk later in life. Poor diet and lack of physical activity account for 30 percent of cancer cases.

"The American Cancer Society has been an advocate for school

health for many years, encouraging schools to embrace student health as a critical component to student success," said Magorien. "Ensuring healthy children today decreases cancer illness and death in the future."

Polly Loy, Ohio State

University Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator in Belmont County helped to coordinate the Cook's conference and noted that this year's registrations include participants from more than a dozen schools in five counties, including most Belmont

County schools.

"Recent state legislative mandates require that schools do more to improve nutrition and physical activity in the schools as part of the fight against childhood obesity," explained Loy. "With tightening budgets and testing pressures, schools are struggling to improve wellness standards for students."

In response to this need, the Belmont County Community and Family Wellness Coalition was formed in November 2006. Made up of representatives from schools, agencies, non-profits, businesses and families, the coalition has facilitated securing nearly \$30,000 in grants and curriculum to sponsor various events and educational efforts related to wellness in Belmont County schools. For more information about the coalition, call the Extension Office at (740) 695-1455.

Action for Healthy Kids is a nationwide initiative dedicated to improving the health and educational performance of children through better nutrition and physical activity in schools. This effort represents a response to our nation's epidemic of overweight, sedentary, and undernourished children and adolescents.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit cancer.org.