

Healthy Kids Healthy Communities

BUILDING HEALTHIER TOMORROWS

Healthy Kids Chaves County Roswell

One day the cafeteria floor underneath the salad bar at Pecos Elementary School was littered with vegetables. Principal Barbara Ryan warned students that she would remove the salad bar if they didn't keep it clean.

The next day the floor was spotless.

"That tells me they really like it. They didn't want to lose it," said Ryan, who is in her ninth year at the Roswell school. "Everything that's in there is good for them."

Putting salad bars in schools involved challenges and expenses that Lyman Graham considered worthwhile to get children to eat nutritious fruits and vegetables. Graham has been food services director for the Roswell Independent School District for 24 years.

He put new salad bars at two elementary schools this year and is adding another two this upcoming school year in addition to current ones at middle and high schools.



Key Community Successes

October 2011 - June 2013

- All 12 Roswell Independent School District (RISD) elementary schools participated in the 5.2.1.O Challenge this past year; 104 third graders successfully completed and were awarded medals
- Installed salad bars in 3 elementary schools
- Established edible gardens in 3 elementary schools
- 2 elementary schools and over 600 students participated in International Walk to School Day in October 2012
- Made infrastructure changes in 2 local parks and held community events to support physical activity and park usage
- Increased community access to locally-grown produce through Roswell farmer's market and Bountiful Baskets food buying club
- Established partnership between City of Roswell and Eastern New Mexico University -Roswell to build bike racks for the city and schools

Community transformation in Roswell has, to date, reached 58% of RISD elementary schools (4,266 students)

The 5.2.1.O Challenge was conducted in all 12 schools and reached 850 third grade students

"I'm into salad bars and fruit snacks because when the students' moms go to the grocery store, fruits are out of their budgets. They buy staples because that's all the money they have," Graham said. "I feel like the school gives kids an opportunity to taste food that they would have never known about if it weren't for the schools."

When he puts vegetables on students' trays, they tend to dump them in the trash. With a salad bar, children love choosing their own food. They see their friends try different produce and develop a taste for new food without wasting any, Graham said.

"Any time I can get a student to enjoy eating at school, I think that's a great success," he said.

Kids get additional opportunities to try new fruit through Lawrence Brothers IGA, Roswell's local grocery store. Blake Meek, the store's manager, donates fruit samples to schools on Fruity Tuesday. Healthy Kids Healthy Chaves County sets up a table at his store twice a month on Tuesday after school to provide free fruit and information about exercise and healthy eating to children.



Blake Meek, Lawrence Brothers IGA store manager

"There's been a great response," Meek said. "It's good for the kids to try to teach them good habits. It's all about encouraging everybody to be healthy but directed at youth in a lot of ways."

To get children excited about vegetables, schools are developing gardens that students tend and harvest. Sandra Barraza from Chaves County Extension assisted with planting and teaching gardening classes at the school. Each grade level at Pecos Elementary has a raised cement garden bed. The school is planning a garden night where students will make salads from their gardens, and parents will receive free seeds and learn how to create their own gardens. "We want to get the healthy thing going on at home too," Ryan said.

Salad bars, fruit tastings and school gardens represent one aspect of the growing number of healthy initiatives that is transforming Chaves County. By working with schools and other local partners, the Healthy Kids Healthy Chaves County initiative is making changes where children live, play and learn so they are more likely to be active and eat healthy foods.



Much of the initiative's focus has been on Roswell with the intent to move to the smaller nearby communities of Dexter, Hagerman and Lake Arthur in future years. With a population of 50,000 in southeastern New Mexico, Roswell is the biggest city in Chaves County, an agricultural community that has seen farms disappear over the years. It's a city with cultural and recreational offerings, including its well-known UFO festivals. And it's a community that supports the Healthy Kids initiative's plan to increase healthy foods and activity in the area.

"The intent from the beginning was to ensure diverse groups were involved from different areas of the community," said Jane Batson, who has helped lead the initiative that is supported by the New Mexico Department of Health. "The second thing is the very purposeful intent to build upon the strengths of people volunteering. I want to make sure every person has a job to do based upon their strengths. If you let that happen, those folks will fly."

What's happened as a result is a community that has embraced the installation of bike racks and bike lanes, the start of gardens and fruit samples at schools, park clean-ups, organized physical activities for children and healthy community events. It is a community that has come together for a common cause. And it's involved many -- city government, schools, Eastern New Mexico University -- Roswell, Chaves County Extension Service, a grocer and athletic and neighborhood associations.

"It's people we knew, and they knew us, and it helps to have been around for so long and have a good reputation so we could convince them," said Paula Camp, a former school teacher who has spent most of her life in Roswell.

Camp has coordinated Healthy Kids Healthy Chaves County for the past year and credits Tamara Fresquez, the previous coordinator, with helping to bring people together and the community for being willing to focus on healthy lifestyles.



Roswell City Mayor Del Journey talks to 3rd graders about healthy eating and active living

“They, too, want to make things better,” Camp said. “The Mayor wants a healthy, thriving city. We do the 5.2.1.0 Mayor’s Challenge in the schools each year. The mayor goes to each school and challenges the kids to 21 days of healthier eating and more physical activity.” Shannon Wooton from Chaves County Extension and the Goddard FFA students perform a skit to teach the kids about the program.

The mayor has had a special coin made to reward the students that complete all 21 days of the challenge. This means eating 5 or more fruits and vegetables a day, trimming screen time to 2 hours or less per day, being active for at least 1 hour a day and drinking lots of H₂O every day.

To encourage families to use neighborhood parks and playgrounds, volunteers trying to improve the built environment of Roswell targeted two schools for clean-up and promotion. At Sunset Elementary and Del Norte Elementary, people are removing trash from nearby parks, putting up signs for walking paths and hosting community events.

At Del Norte, students walk around the nearby park during Walking Wednesday. They get a bead for every lap and turn the beads in for activity prizes, Camp said.

“My husband and I walk with my kindergarten grandson on Wednesdays, and other parents do the same thing,” she said. “We’re trying to make it bigger and better and spread it.” Sunset also has a walking program on Wednesday. They get a card stamped for every lap.

In conjunction with International Walk to School Day in early October 2012, Camp and volunteers organized a comprehensive walk and roll day for Del Norte and Washington Avenue Elementary School.



The mayor led the walk; police controlled traffic; the superintendent rode his bike; and more than 600 parents, grandparents, siblings, dogs and students paraded to school.

Camp, Fresquez, Barraza, Wooton and Batson have started with pilot projects they intend to grow and expand into other schools and communities. It seems their partners are on board as well. Michael Vickers, Roswell's city planner, has guided the city's role in making Roswell's streets friendlier to pedestrians and bikers.



Roswell City Mayor Del Jurney safely ushers walk & rollers across the street

“What’s really cool about stuff like this is it gets people talking as a starting-off point,” Vickers said. “When people start talking about things and getting excited, the possibilities increase exponentially.”