

OUR TOWNS

Gayville
Mission Hill
Volin

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Grants Give Boost To GV Nutrition Program

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GAYVILLE — As she washed strawberries, Carol Sue Roozen pulled out one exceptional beauty. "This one's a whopper!" she said, examining it as if it was a ruby.

Roozen and Ardy Olson, who worked next to her, are volunteers who wash and prepare produce for the Gayville-Volin school district's "Fresh Fruits and Veggies" program. The other volunteers are Jane Petersen, Marie Erickson, Glennys Jepsen and Ella Hirak.

Jared Hjelm, a Gayville-Volin High School senior, loaded up the 120 cups of strawberries. He set out some of the cups on tables in the lunchroom commons, where students picked them up between classes. The rest were taken to younger students in their classrooms.

"We have parents who say their children eat more fruit and vegetables because of this," Olson said. "The fruit goes over much better than the vegetables. Pineapple is very popular, and they also like oranges, apples and bananas."

The scene has become familiar at Gayville-Volin, which has received grants for the second year to promote its nutrition program. The district received three mini-grants in addition to \$16,000 for the fresh U.S.-grown produce purchased through the Hy-Vee supermarket in Yankton.

The South Dakota Department of Education recently awarded 45 mini-grants totaling \$34,675 in three different categories as part of the Team Nutrition program. Grant recipients included school districts, day-care centers and after-school programs.

Gayville-Volin received \$2,000 for the Registered Dietitian program and \$500 each for the Gardening and the Fun Fruits and Veggies Event categories.

Recipients must be participating in one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child Nutrition Programs and must also be enrolled in Team Nutrition. Developed in response to a rapidly increasing rate of childhood obesity, Team Nutrition is a comprehensive, behavior-based plan to promote the nutritional health of the nation's school children.

Gayville-Volin teacher Larry Buffington serves as the district's wellness director and supervises the Team Nutrition programs.

The district will celebrate Healthy Gayville-Volin Week during March 22-26. This spring, the district will promote Fun Fruits and Veggies in conjunction with another event.

The programs fight childhood obesity and help students make good decisions about healthy lifestyles, Buffington said.

"You are supposed to eat 5 to 9 servings (of fruits and vegetables) a day," he said. "It's hard to get into the habit, especially this time of year."

The students are not the only ones who benefit from the programs, Buffington said. "We kick off the parent-teacher conferences with a healthy snack for the parents and students," he said.

In addition, the gardening grant helped start a community garden in Gayville. The effort is now under way to start a similar gar-



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

Gayville-Volin High School senior Jared Hjelm loads up cups of strawberries for delivery to the lunchroom commons and the classrooms. Carol Sue Roozen (in the background) and Ardy Olson (not pictured) are two of the volunteers preparing the produce, purchased through a nutrition grant.

den in Volin. Cynthia Jensen, a master gardener, works with the program.

"Right now, we do the planting during the school field day in the spring," Buffington said. "It's tend-

er over the summer by the community members and by students in the school's summer enrichment program. Then we serve the produce at the Back To School Night in the fall. People are also

free to pick food and eat it."

School librarian Jenny Rice, who works with the Team Nutrition programs, said the community gardens are falling into place. The project is also receiving assistance from the Volin-Gayville "Horizons" community development program.

"We have the volunteers lined up, but we need to get a site in Volin," she said. "CorTrust (Bank) has worked to collect seeds, and we can also use some of the seeds left over from the 'Seeds for Soldiers' program."

Another project sets up a "bounty table" in front of Mac's Pub in Volin and the Gayville Community Center, Rice said.

"We hope we can get some of the food out of our community gardens and start using it for the food pantry," she said.

The \$2,000 grant for the dietitian brings Eileen Hillesland to the school, Rice said. Hillesland is budgeted for 20 hours of consultation on healthy meals and health classes. The goal is to provide resources for students, parents and staff for healthy meal planning.

The programs have already produced positive results, Rice said.

"Larry (Buffington) feels very passionate about healthy lifestyles and good nutrition. You get moving (with exercise), and you make smarter choices about what you put into your system," she said. "You read about kids who don't eat breakfast and instead grab a candy bar and bottle of pop. Now, we have kids who are more than willing to try raw fruits and vegetables that they are not trying at home."

Gayville-Volin also received a free scale and other measuring devices to record students' height and weight, Buffington said.

He said he already sees positive results from the healthier lifestyles.

"Every school in the state has an activities director, and they get paid for their time," he said. "I think every school needs a wellness director, because the work affects every one of the students."

Buffington has become well known around South Dakota for his work, said Gayville-Volin business manager Jason Nowak.

"Larry is so passionate about 'Healthy Gayville-Volin' that he has been invited to talk at the state level," Nowak said. "Last year was our first year with these grants, and it was such a learning curve. There are also drawbacks, like the custodians having more work. But the kids are eating better with the fruits and vegetables and our unlimited salad bar at lunch."

Nowak related one surprising moment.

"I was amazed, when we started last year, that we had muskmelon and there was a student who didn't know what it was," he said.

"The kids get interesting opportunities because of this. We would never be able to afford \$16,000 for snacks through the school. Without this grant, it's an opportunity that wouldn't be there for them."

Buffington said he already plans to apply for next year's grants.

"This is one of the most rewarding projects in all my years of education," he said. "The kids enjoy it and respond well. They appreciate what we offer here. They are learning proper nutrition, which leads to proper learning."

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