

Kids whip up healthy options as Food Network gets back to basics



By Brock Weir

Forget pumpkin spice, it was all about the smells of apple and cinnamon at the York Region Food Network last Friday as local kids spent their October P.A. day whipping up healthy snack options.

The York Region Food Network (YRFN), in conjunction with Windfall Ecology Centre's Healthy Kids Community Challenge, was a veritable kitchen stadium as a dozen local elementary schools spent their P.A. Day split up into two groups, led by Chef Maxine Knight, to put their very best spins on stuffed apples and muffins.

It is the latest program in Aurora to get kids to turn off their smartphones and put down the game controllers and step into the kitchen.

“We have been doing family cooking classes with the Town of Aurora and it went great, but we had some extra resources left over and wanted to explore our different cooking options,” said Windfall's Kathleen Ko. “The kids love it and the parents love it for the kids as well. The YRFN has been a great partner already, so we reached out to them and asked them if they would help us put together something and they came up with the idea for healthy snacks, which fits in perfectly.

“We know that a lot of calories the kids consume are from snacks outside of mealtime, so it is really important to not focus just on what kids are eating at breakfast, lunch and dinner, but what they are eating between all of those meals.”

This was equally important to the parents in attendance as well.

Lisa Meglio, for instance, grew up with parents who had restaurants. Hers was not a fast food upbringing and, as a parent, they are roots that continue to support a new generation.

“We try to foster healthy choices at home and we're always talking about it,” said Lisa. “I thought it would be a nice opportunity for [my daughter] to work with some other kids, do some cooking, learn some healthy eating facts and maybe walk away with the ability to help at home in the kitchen a little bit more.

“We talk a lot about menus every week, I get their input on what they would like in their lunches and dinners, and we work together to make sure that choices are healthy and grounded. Growing up with parents who had restaurants, it was grounded in me, and it is just instinctively handed off to them. They were very aware that everything comes from cooking at home. We kind of keep it clean and cook at home, and my hope is [the kids] will walk away from this and keep things up.”

It seems like a basic philosophy, and it is, but it is a philosophy that is very much a part of both the Healthy Kids Community Challenge and the York Region Food Network.

While the P.A. Day cooking program will return to the York Region Food Network on the next P.A. Day, November 24, the Food Network will be going back to basics the previous Tuesday, November 21, with a morning of conversation about food skills, food waste, and food insecurity.

Running from 9.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Newmarket Community Centre & Lions Hall, the event will highlight food as a basic human right but a human right that is at the centre of “many of our community's most pressing issues, including health, environment, and income.”

?This event will explore the importance of basic food skills in improving nutrition and reducing food waste and the need for basic income to impact food insecurity,? say organizers.

The event is free, will include food skill demonstrations, and lunch will be provided.

To register, visit food4change_backtobasics.eventbrite.com or call the York Region Food Network at 905-841-3101.