

## **Yuk to yummy**

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**By cory francer**

*cory.francer@gmail.com*

Sometimes a little feta cheese can go a long way.

This, and other lessons in improving the taste and nutrition of Bedford's school lunches, was on display Monday, Aug. 22, in a workshop led by Liz Barbour in the Bedford High School kitchen.

Barbour runs Liz Barbour's Creative Feast, a company that provides cooking classes and demonstrations.

Barbour brought her experience and knowledge to a workshop for school district food service employees.

Barbour said with all of the restrictions put on school lunches these days, it's important for staff to be able to work around them to provide students with the best lunches possible.

"They have a lot of restrictions, and it's my hope they can navigate those restrictions while providing food to enjoy," Barbour said.

One demonstration focused on brown rice to show how it's possible to improve on bland government-issued food. Barbour first distributed a sample of the rice on its own for the audience to taste, with most in agreement that its tastelessness would not resonate well with students.

But then she added some parsley for seasoning. Most agreed that it was a noticeable improvement, but still not necessarily one that would have kids raving. The third sample added a small sprinkling of feta cheese, which prompted a unanimous sentiment that this dish would be popular as a side item for a school lunch.

Another important improvement Barbour suggested is how to get around the blandness of canned vegetables. Since schools don't always have the resources for fresh produce, Barbour said a typically undesirable can of green beans can become appetizing if its contents are rinsed of all the salt and sautéed with ham.

In addition to the importance of the daily nutrition that the kitchen staff provides to students, Barbour stressed the idea that lunch is the only pressure-free time students have throughout their day.

Because of this, it's the responsibility of the kitchen staff to be warm and welcoming to kids coming into the cafeteria. This not only enhances the no-pressure atmosphere of lunchtime, but can also encourage the students to eat the healthier food options they are given.

"What these ladies need is someone to tell them how important they are to a kid's day," Barbour said. "Lunch is 20 minutes of time when no one is asking anything of these kids. The food they eat is so important for the rest of the day."

Nutrition education can also be brought into the home, Barbour said. If parents are preparing whole grains for kids at dinner, they will recognize it at school and reach for the healthy brown rice at lunch rather than more common white rice.

With Barbour's lessons and a fresh perspective on school cooking, Bedford's cafeteria staff will have some new ideas to bring to the kitchen for the 2011-12 school year.

Barbour said the stigma of boring school lunches with little nutritional value is something that needs to be discarded.

"You can take a simple bland thing and go in so many different directions," she said.