

# Healthier lunches coming to Cardiff schools

by Wehtahnah Tucker The Coast News October 29, 2010



Georgia Goldsmith, 8, enjoys a sample of healthy burritos at Cardiff Elementary on Oct. 22.  
*Photo by Wehtahnah Tucker*

CARDIFF BY THE SEA — Feeding the young masses healthy food is not an easy task. But Sandy Smith, Cardiff school district's cafeteria manager, along with several other parents and organizations, is trying to make it happen. The 25-year veteran of the school district is a pivotal partner in the effort to bring healthier lunches to the students at both Cardiff Elementary and Ada Harris.

The district's "health council" is mounting an effort to make the standard cafeteria food that has earned a reputation at most schools for tasting bad and providing little nutrients into a more healthful, tasty experience for students.

Chickpeas, a local company that helps schools provide nutritious, balanced and delicious lunches to its students, has been consulting with the district. Co-owner Julie Frans said she uses a rule of thumb when deciding what ingredients to use. "I always ask myself 'Would I feed this to my son?'" she said.

Consultant Phil Barth joined Frans at Cardiff Elementary on Oct. 22 as several students lined up to sample the bean and cheese burrito that was infused with pureed yams. "There's so much more nutrition and not much change in the taste," Barth said.

Indeed, students gave the burrito and the other kid-friendly foods sampled that week an enthusiastic thumbs-up. "I like it," said third-grader Georgia Goldsmith as she finished her burrito. Each child was encouraged to cast their vote and the tally was posted for everyone to see. "We want them to enjoy what they're eating," Frans said.

Chickpeas is working with Smith and the entire kitchen staff to train them on how to incorporate healthy ingredients into the menu. Pureed vegetables are included in mac 'n' cheese, spaghetti sauce, chili, turkey tacos, refried beans and more to increase the nutritional value and variety of the food.

The Machado Foundation is funding the cost of the consultation. In its three years of partnership with the districts two elementary schools, it has funded Ocean Environmental Education plus a major theme including organic gardening, recycling efforts and now healthy food.

Approximately 300 students eat hot lunches provided by the school and the council aims to increase the number. "Budgeting is always a challenge," Smith said. Frans estimates that an organic, nutritious lunch costs around \$5. "That's barely breaking even."

In a time when school districts are cutting back to operate on shrinking budgets, Cardiff has taken the lead to partner with organizations and involve parents as a way to prioritize a healthy lunch program. "We're trying to do the healthiest thing we can do," Smith said.

Local organic ingredients from Be Wise Ranch are donated on a weekly basis to increase the nutritional value of the lunches. Carolyn Whitehouse, a parent and member of the health council, said the transition to healthier lunches is about more than just a meal. With the educational component, nutritional assemblies and an emphasis on fresh foods, students and their families are learning the value of healthy food that leads to a healthier lifestyle.