

## **SCHOOLS, WORK SITES WIN HEALTHY LAURELS**

By MARIE VASARI  
Herald Staff Writer  
Monterey County Herald

At Salinas Adult School, it's easier for employees to get a bit of exercise on break than it is to buy a Coke.

That's because the campus has adopted measures in recent years to promote health and nutrition for its students and employees.

Staff members are encouraged to walk on their breaks, and the cafeteria includes nutritious choices from salads to soups.

Salinas Adult School was one of 15 Salinas organizations recognized this week for efforts to make their work environments a healthy, active place. Eight taquerias, four schools, two businesses and one church were winners of the first Workwell Fit Business Awards, coordinated by the Monterey County Department of Health.

The first-time campaign asked Salinas organizations to highlight measures they have implemented. It's part of the Steps to Healthier Salinas program, which began in 2003 as one of the original 12 communities chosen by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention nationwide.

Among the steps chosen by winning businesses were eliminating trans fats and offering healthier, more nutritious menu options at restaurants, and offering free wellness assessments to employees.

At Salinas Adult School, the health messages are pervasive.

"Because of our programs, we've always been very aware of health, fitness, nutrition and so on," said Salinas Adult School Director Corinne Price. "We have it in all of our classes, and we try to keep up to date with whatever is going on."

That means nutritious snacks for children during parenting education programs, and a community garden where students can grow their own vegetables. English as a Second Language programs include instruction on health and nutrition, and it's also a requirement for GED students. The school frequently offers classes in nutrition, and workshops geared toward fitness. Since last year, the vending machines have offered water and juice, nuts and trail mixes rather than preservative-dense fatty choices, in compliance with school nutritional standards.

"It's embedded in every one of our programs," said Price. "No matter where you look in our programs, it's there."

While the changes may not seem drastic, their impact is far-reaching: Last year, the site served 22,869 pupils.

The goal, said Price, is to teach by modeling and to raise awareness. Employees take part in the Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare Systems Exercise Challenge, and the school encourages staff to walk during their breaks.

"We're trying to meet that need to the best of our ability, to let people know what is good for them and what isn't good for them."

But she knows changing public health patterns isn't something that happens overnight.

"Change takes time," said Price, "and changing your own habits is the hardest thing to do."

The county's health department started working with local taquerias in 2006, and several have been recognized as Fit Business Award winners. Each of them distribute health education materials, designate their entryways as smoke-free areas, and offer healthful menu items and substitutions.

**La Alteña Taqueria y Mariscos:** Patrons can choose a range of healthier food choices, from whole beans and whole-wheat tortillas to a salad entree and seafoods, and the restaurant doesn't use lard or trans fats.

**Super Antojitos Tepa:** A new eatery that promotes its healthy options with photo signage and table tents. Those options include whole beans, whole-wheat tortillas, a salad entree and healthy drink options.

**Taqueria Los Gallos and Gallo de Oro:** These two restaurants, under shared ownership, offer whole beans, whole-wheat tortillas, vegetarian menu options and a healthier kid's plate. They also cook without trans fats.

**La Estrella Deli:** Whole beans, whole-wheat tortillas, fresh-squeezed juices, salads and breakfast choices such as oatmeal and yogurt parfaits are among the menu choices. The restaurant uses no trans fats in its cooking.

**Mi Ranchito Taqueria (two sites):** Uses no lard or trans fats in its cooking, offers fresh-squeezed juices, lean meats and skims the fats from soups. Several low-fat dishes, including seafood, are available, and dishes are now served without additional french fries.

Ole Taqueria & Grill: In addition to whole-wheat tortillas, this restaurant offers spinach or tomato versions, as well as whole beans. The restaurant uses no trans fat and has introduced healthier options and controlled portions for customers.

Salinas City Elementary School District office staff: Employees became more involved with the health activities their insurance group offers and have a chance to participate in free wellness assessments, including blood pressure and cholesterol checks. They participate in a 10K-a-day program, have walking groups during lunch and breaks, and have eliminated snack vending machines

Salinas Adult School: Offers classes in nutrition and physical fitness for all ages. In 2007, the school eliminated unhealthy food in its vending machines, replacing them with healthful snacks. Exercise, including walking breaks, is encouraged.

Mount Toro High School: Encourages yearlong participation in the Salinas Valley Memorial Exercise challenge for its employees, and encourages staff to walk during breaks and be physically active during the day. Only low-fat foods and water are provided by the school at meetings, and healthy choices in vending machines.

Alisal Union School District: Provides wellness classes to its staff, who then teach parents about nutrition and physical activity. Foodservice provides healthy celebration demonstrations to staff so they can plan alternatives to the traditional sugar-laden celebrations at work and home. A catering service for parents offers healthy lunch and dinner options for busy families, and teachers and staff can be seen on the playground with the children, modeling physical activity they hope to promote.

Community Praise Church: A nondenominational church that celebrates Sunday services at Boronda Meadows School, the church started developing a wellness policy with a registered nurse back in 2005, and now offers healthful foods during weekly gatherings and no sodas, only water, fruit juices, coffee and tea.

They also offer stretching and jumping during worship. A no-smoking zone has been declared for all meeting places, and a "Day at the Spa" annual retreat for wellness is offered.

Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System: Its cafeteria provides heart-healthy menus, fruits and vegetables and a salad bar, and the vending machine also offers fruit, nuts and water. A gym is available for employees to use for free, or they can get discounts at various gyms around town. Wellness classes are offered for weight management, smoking cessation, stress management and yoga.

It spearheaded a 10-week Exercise Challenge in which 167 businesses participate, including 850 hospital employees and 3,000 participants from local business, and host a Heart and Sole 5K and 10K race, adding a Just Run event for kids in 2007.

Dole Fresh Vegetables: In addition to promoting the health benefits of eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables to consumers, Dole's wellness program includes regular distribution of bilingual materials to its employees emphasizing nutrition, health and exercise.

In 2007, the salad plant introduced its "Biggest Loser" contest promoting both weight loss and nutrition. The Commodities Group in conjunction with the Network for a Healthy California Worksite Program initiated a 10-week program aimed at empowering employees with knowledge on how to make healthful meal and snack choices, and this year plans to continue nutrition and physical fitness education outreach to employees.

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Marie Vasari can be reached at [mvasari@montereyherald.com](mailto:mvasari@montereyherald.com) or 646-4478.