Selinsgrove A.S.D. Parent Helps Improve Food Service Web Site

A question and answer session during a school board meeting of the Selinsgrove Area School District produced an offer that Foodservice Director Kevin Oswald couldn't refuse. Newcomer Cindy O'Hora had explained that she would like to help in upgrading the district's web site. She told about recently using the Internet to conduct research before she and her husband moved their family to the area. The Selinsgrove district's web site had not provided as much information as she thought it could, and, with 15 years of web-development skills, Cindy wanted to help the schools her children were now attending by donating those skills to improve the web site.

With a full plate of other duties that allowed him little time to work on the foodservice department's web pages, Kevin readily took Cindy up on her offer. A week after the board meeting they met to plan their work together. Cindy had helped with the web site for her previous school district in Lancaster County, so she had content ideas based on that experience. And because she was new to the Selinsgrove area, she was delighted that Kevin was interested in posting the answers to her questions about his department, such as how to pay for meals without sending money to school.

Kevin and Cindy revamped the site with the following objectives in mind:

- The public will be able to find Foodservice Department information, such as staff photos, student account data, menus, and a description of the program.
- The site will provide access to this positive information about the department in a professional-looking format.
- Community involvement with the department will be encouraged.

Since implementing the changes and additions, Kevin and Cindy remain in contact and Cindy can easily update the site as needed from home. The Foodservice area of the Selinsgrove A.S.D. web site now features the following:

- General School Lunch Program information
Because Cindy donated her time and expertise, and because the computer equipment and district personnel were already in place, there was no additional cost to the school district for development of these web pages.

Cindy's knowledge and appreciation of school foodservice has changed "100%!" She is now aware of the department's efforts to provide variety and quality and to meet the needs of students with special dietary needs. "It is very important for parents to be involved with their school districts," Cindy advises. "I believe that our district strives to provide quality meals. When parents are involved they appreciate how the programs operate and learn how the students' meals are paid for. By being involved, parents have opportunities to provide input about menus. The eating environment can also benefit from parental support: there is more 'order' in the cafeteria if someone's mother is walking around!"

Kevin believes that the best thing about this collaboration is the large amount of information that is being offered to the public as a result. He is easily presenting information about foodservice promotional efforts and the variety of healthy choices available to the students. He is also pleased to report that many families are using the pre-pay feature of his program now that it is available through the web site.

While working with the district's Foodservice Director Cindy learned more about the nutrition environment at her children's schools. "I can be a better activist for my children by being more informed about nutrition practices in school," she states. "I have taken action against mixed messages and empty nutrition. I have an issue with using food as a reward. The children should earn 10 extra minutes of recess instead of parties."

Cindy has thoughts on parent involvement in other aspects of the school nutrition environment: "The schools need better fundraisers. Parents need to step forward with ideas. We need to support the shutting off of vending machines. Students will object to changes, so it helps the district if there is advocacy with parents and taxpayers."

This parent's "nutrition activism" with her children's new school district began with a
positive step, her offer to help with the web site, and has led to a productive relationship with the foodservice department. By combining this "inside" connection with her concerns about the total school nutrition environment Cindy is exploring ways to help her children's schools provide messages about nutrition that reflect the standards she models for her children at home.