

Health starts at home

Jessica Kutz, Planet Contributor | Posted: Tuesday, September 6, 2016 4:54 pm

A free six-week-long cooking class starting in September called Cooking Matters will equip participants with the knowledge and skill set to feed their friends and family healthy meals on a budget.

Starting Sept. 13, the class will be conducted every Tuesday, from 5-7 p.m. at the Telluride Christian Fellowship building. The two-hour-long workshop will teach cooking basics and each session will end with the preparation of a healthy meal. The course will also teach participants useful information like how to dissect food labels and buy healthy food items on a budget.

The Tri-County Health Network, a local nonprofit, is partnering with Share Our Strength, an organization based out of Denver, in putting on the class as one of several initiatives it promotes to improve health in San Miguel, Montrose and Ouray counties.

The network was founded in 2008 when the necessity for improved access to health care and affordable health services in the tri-county region of southwest Colorado became apparent after discussions conducted between the Telluride Foundation and regional healthcare leaders.

Although the network has conducted the class several times in other parts of the tri-county region, this will be the first time the class has taken place in Telluride.

A certified chef will lead the course instruction, accompanied by a nutrition educator. The class is interactive — no monotonous slideshows about vegetables. Instead, class-goers will be fully involved and actively participate in the lesson plans, learning portion control, knife skills and how to pair spices and seasonings.

A unique part of this program is that participants will be sent home every week with a bag of groceries comprised of the ingredients from that day's lesson. This is to ensure that they can cook these specific meals for their own family and friends and spread the health benefits.

In the past, participants have cooked everything from spaghetti squash to Chinese rice and tamales.

“You learn these really yummy dishes with limited amount of ingredients but they are really tasty and really fun to make and it is fun to include your family in that process too,” said Sara Ballantyne, clinical assistant at the Tri-County Health Network.

Past participants have also learned simple ways to make healthier choices, such as adding slices of cucumber to water to make it more refreshing rather than grabbing a soda, Ballantyne said.



Wellness

Participants prepare a meal at a previous Cooking Matters class. [Courtesy photo]

According to Ballantyne, “The target audience is people who are on a fixed income or struggling to feed themselves or their family and (the course is) really to teach them that you can eat healthy and affordably.”

In a place like Telluride where groceries are particularly expensive, this class could be useful to community members who want to lead healthier lives, the health network staffer said. “Although living here is challenging, there are resources out there and ways to do it that make it affordable and make it healthy,” Ballantyne said.

Ballantyne stresses that this isn’t “just a cooking class,” but that it could really help individuals who are “challenged to feed their families or just themselves.”

“I think all of us lead very busy lives and sometimes our food choices don’t become a priority in our lives. There is a lot of evidence out there that what you put into your body has a lasting impact,” Ballantyne said.

The class can accommodate up to 15 people and there were still several open spots as of last week. To register for the class or to learn more information about the Tri-County Health Network, contact Hannah Wilson at 970-708-4458.