



200 Grand River Avenue Ste 102
Port Huron, Michigan 48060-4015
Phone: 810-989-6935

E-mail: msue.stclair@county.msu.edu
Fax: 810-985-3557
Web: msue.msu.edu/stclair

March 2009

Elementary students discover new foods with help from MSU Extension

For the past three years MSU Extension nutrition instructors have participated in a health fair for students at Port Huron's Crull/McKinley Elementary School.

This year's event allowed 650 students to accept the challenge of trying a new fruit or vegetable through a fun activity. St. Clair County MSU Extension staff developed their own version of the TV show "Fear Factor" to encourage children to try new fruits and vegetables.

Through the game, MSU Extension nutrition instructors offered the students and teachers a chance to taste new produce without having to resort to coaxing or bribery. Some of the produce, like grape tomatoes and colorful bell peppers, are familiar to the students. Others, like horned melon, are unusual and some, like the maroon carrot and baby kiwi, take familiar food in unfamiliar directions.

To build their comfort levels the students could taste (not always swallowing) the new produce alongside recognizable fruits and veggies. Nutrition experts point out that tasting is a first step to incorporating fruits and vegetables into regular eating habits.

Health fair committee member Sue Amato, an educator with the St. Clair County Health Department, said that MSU Extension was asked to participate because the challenge provides an opportunity for students to try new foods.

The activity's ultimate goal is that the children will encourage their families to purchase the new fruits and vegetables that they enjoyed in the taste testing experience. School staff like the "Food Fear Factor" format because it takes the risk out of tasting new foods and allows the students to have fun with nutrition.

*Contact: Kim Mihelich, Extension Educator
810-989-6935*

MSU Extension helps families "Spring into Gardening"

The St. Clair County MSU Extension office, in collaboration with the St. Clair County Master Gardener Association, provided a breath of spring in February with the 2009 "Spring into Gardening" program. The event included workshops related to horticulture and gardening.

More than 100 families discovered the fun of gardening. Children learned how to build bluebird houses, make insect nets, germinate houseplants, make bird feeders, plant pizza gardens, learn about caterpillars and visit horticulture investigation stations.

This event helps families to prepare for the garden season and allows the St. Clair County Master Garden Association volunteer members to share their gardening skills.

Many participants called the bluebird house and bird feeder activities their favorite activities. When asked whether they planned to do any of the activities they learned about at home, composting and recycling were identified more than half who attended. Through these workshops young people learn about nature. They also develop respect and appreciation of stewardship toward natural resources.

The strong collaborative relationship between St. Clair County MSU Extension and the St. Clair County Master Garden Association fills a void left when county budget restraints eliminated support for the St. Clair County Extension horticulture educator. This relationship supports the Master Garden certification program and "Spring into Gardening."

*Contact: Laurie Dennis
Master Gardener Coordinator
810-989-6935*

4-H community service project blankets teens with learning, positive experience

U.S. society is based on the idea that all people are responsible for the well-being of the community, country and world. St. Clair County 4-H Youth Development continues to build on this idea, and the phrase of the 4-H pledge that invokes youngsters to pledge their hands to greater service by providing variety of community service projects.

One recent activity was a Project Linus event. In its second year, the project was originally spearheaded by teen leader Angelina Taylor as her 4-H club's community service project. As a result of a personal experience from a classmate who was in the hospital, she connected up with the Macomb Chapter contact of Project Linus.

Project Linus is a non-profit organization with a two-fold mission. It aims to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized or otherwise in need, through the gifts of new, handmade blankets and afghans, lovingly created by volunteer blanket makers. It also provides a rewarding and fun service opportunity for individuals and community groups who want to help children.

Angelina engaged fellow 4-H members Kathryn Roggenbuck, Ashleigh Usakowski and Jessica Usakowski to share leadership for this year's event. With the idea of developing this into a true community service project, they reached out to involve youngsters from across the county and solicited for donations of material from area businesses.

As a result 95 people helped in the event. More than 50 4-H members, 10 4-H leaders, 20 National Honor Society students and 12 volunteers used 313 yards of fleece to craft blankets.

A conservative estimate of the value of the donated fabric was well over \$2,200. In addition, just over \$100 collected covered the volunteers' lunch at the blanket-making event.

The group made 106 blankets, eight pillows and five scarves. Half of the blankets will be given to the Port Huron Hospital and the other half will be delivered to the Macomb Chapter of Project Linus to be delivered to Children's Hospital in Detroit.

"For me, it helps me to feel better that I am making the world a better place," Angela says.

This opportunity helped the teen coordinators develop leadership, communication and organizational skills and a sense of empowerment.

The participants supported the Project Linus mission to, "provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort." It was evident from the responses, the productivity and the smiles that by giving back to their community, the participating young people learned the value of helping others, cooperation, teamwork, and developed a sense of responsibility.

*Contact: Gilda Schott
Extension Educator 4-H Youth Program
810-989-6935*



Angelina Taylor with more than 100 finished blankets from the Project Linus 4-H community service event.