



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dare to be Healthy Launches Eat Healthy Southwest Louisiana Restaurant Initiative



Eat Healthy SWLA “veggie ribbon” cutting!

Cutting the creative ribbon of fresh vegetables is (center) Janice Ackley, Dare to be Healthy (left to right) Dave Evans, owner/chef Luna Bar & Grill; Lydia Martin BCBSLAF Strategic Initiatives Manager; Taylor Rossi, Eat Healthy Registered Dietitian, Chef Joseph Jaskiewicz, Delta Downs Racetrack, Casino and Hotel; Owner Rocky Keeley, Gatti’s Pizza (Back Row—left to right) Mayor Randy Roach, Mayor Chris Duncan, Chef Chad Jackson, Lake Charles Country Club; Danielle Edwards, Partnership for a Healthier SWLA, Darrel Metoyer, Delta Downs; Dennis Scott, CPPJ and Allison Callahan, Eat Healthy Intern.



Local chefs Chad Jackson and Dave Evans pledge to offer healthier menu options.

(Lake Charles—July 6, 2014) -- We eat out about four times a week, according to studies on American eating habits. In fact, we spend half of our disposable cash on those eatery excursions. Couple that with the fact that nearly all entrees eaten out are higher in calories, fat and sodium, versus meals cooked at home. So it's easy to see how our collective waist lines have grown.

Eat Healthy SWLA is part of a shrewd plan for beating back obesity numbers here in Southwest Louisiana, where obesity rates for the adult population is at 37% — higher than the national and state average.

“That is a sobering number,” said Janice Ackley, with the Dare to be Healthy program. The idea? If you want people to eat better, start with where they eat — at the restaurants.

Eat Healthy Southwest Louisiana is a push to encourage restaurant owners and chefs to put healthy meal options on the menu. What's considered healthy? Low calories (under 600), low sodium (under 800 mg), low fat (under 10% from saturated fat). Guidelines for appetizers, soups, salads and desserts are even tighter.

Entrees meeting the standard will be highlighted on the menu with a green fork icon.



It's no joke earning that icon, participating chefs say. Dietitians must carefully scrutinize each new meal option — and will kick it back, with helpful recommendations, if the entree isn't within the guidelines. Wait staff is trained on the Eat Healthy program and supports diner's making healthy choices.



Lake Charles Country Club Eat Healthy Menu Item
Mixed Berry Crisp, 300 calories



Lake Charles Country Club Eat Healthy Menu Item
Lemongrass Ahi Tuna, 340 calories.

“Frankly, our guests are beginning to demand these changes,” said Executive Chef Chad Jackson with the [Lake Charles Country Club](#), one of four Eat Healthy SWLA flagship restaurant partners with the program.

And it's not just country club food fare involved in the initiative. Even joints offering comfort foods — like pizza — can do better, says owner Rocky Keeley with [Gatti's Pizza](#).

“Why is a pizza buffet restaurant here in the first place,” Keeley asked the crowd. “I'm surprised myself. But I went to them and said I want to participate and they said I could. And I'm glad to be here.”



Both Gatti's Pizza locations—Sulphur and Lake Charles are offering small changes — but changes that can add up to a big calorie difference (low-fat cheese on pizzas, low sodium sandwiches, low fat dressings and a “how to build a healthy salad” display to educate diners on selection and portion control at the salad bar).

[Luna Bar and Grill](#) in Lake Charles is participating and has designated many menu items on his Eat Healthy menu. His next goal is to create a healthy kids menu. [Delta Downs](#) Racetrack, Casino and Hotel is partnering with Eat Healthy to bring healthier menu choices to over 700 Delta Down employees and to diners at Vista Restaurant and Food Court.

“It’s starting with us,” Jackson said to the crowd, “and hopefully we can start pushing each other, as chefs and restaurant owners to say, ‘Hey, we can do this.’ We just have to stay focused on the goal.”

The Eat Healthy SWLA program kicked off in late June at the Lake Charles Country Club, with an official “ribbon” (i.e., a vegetable-strewn string) cutting ceremony, followed by a tasting lunch of chilled avocado soup (280 calories), seared lemongrass ‘Hai tuna over melon (340 calories), and a mixed berry crisp (300 calories).

Dare to be Healthy is the latest Challenge Grant supported initiative made possible by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation. The restaurant partnership programs underscore the true purpose of the Challenge Grants, as noted by our own Lydia Martin (strategic initiatives manager for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana Foundation). Speaking to the crowd community supporters, dietitians, and restaurant owners, managers and chefs gathered at the kick-off, Martin said, “We asked everyone to focus on two things — eat healthy and live an active lifestyle. And this program really fits that focus. With luck, what happens here in Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana will catch fire and touch not just lives here, but those in surrounding communities, too. And we’re proud to be part of that effort.”



If you would like to learn more about the Eat Healthy Southwest Louisiana Restaurant Initiative, please contact Janice Ackley at 337-478-4822 Ext. 12 or healthy@swlahec.com. Check out our website healthierswla.com and Facebook Eat Healthy Southwest Louisiana.



BCBSLAF's Lydia Martin, post ribbon cutting, with Dave Evans, Eat Healthy SWLA chef with Luna Bar & Grill

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