

Go to : Our Towns

Our Papers

HOME | CLASSIFIEDS | NEWSLETTER | SUBSCRIBE | CONTACT US | SITEMAP

"THE FUN NEVER STOPS!"
- Associated Press



The Marvelous
Wonderettes

The New '50s Pop Hit Musical Comedy
[Click Here For Tickets!](#)

Tastefully
central jersey
DINING GUIDE

centraljersey.com
local voices local choices

NEWSLETTER
[PLACE AN AD](#)

WEATHER
[SUBSCRIBE](#)

NEWS ENTERTAINMENT SPORTS HEALTH OBITUARIES DINING BLOGS PEOPLE CLASSIFIEDS SERVICES BUSINESS LISTINGS HOMES JOBS CARS

News Blog : BORDENTOWN CITY: Police charge couple in armed robbery

Search this Site Find us on Follow us on RSS

NEWS ATHLETE HS SPORTS OPINIONS LIFESTYLE OBITS

No comments posted. | Email this story | Print this

PRINCETON AREA: Farm fresh: Nourishing a farm-to-school network

Wednesday, April 22, 2009 11:26 AM EDT

By John Dunphy Special Writer

SHARE

Given the option, would parents rather have their children's school lunches come from the farmer a few miles away or from the other side of the country?

Newly appointed New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher posed that question to an audience of about 200 Saturday morning at The Lawrenceville School, where the New Jersey Farm-to-School Network was holding its inaugural conference.

"I can't imagine someone saying, 'No, I'd rather have them have something from 1,000 miles away,'" Mr. Fisher said. "But that's what happens."

This disconnect between local growers and some of their youngest potential customers has spurred interest throughout the country in bringing the two parties back together through various farm-to-school programs. Started as a pilot program in 1996 in several California and Florida schools, the National Farm-to-School Network estimates there are now more than 2,000 such programs in 39 states.

Saturday's conference was the first major event held by the newly established New Jersey network.

"We need to teach children where their food comes from," said Mikey Azzara, the co-founder of the Lawrenceville Farmers' Market and local leader in food and farm culture. Along with Beth Feehan, founder of the West Windsor Farmers' Market, Mr. Azzara began planning last year to bring the farm-to-school program to New Jersey.

"There's so many of us that wanted to start this, so how much more could we achieve if we worked together?" Mr. Azzara asked. "This conference is to bring people together and provide tools, build energy and express the value of a network (connecting) parents, food service providers and others."

Mr. Fisher, whose family has farmed in South Jersey for more than a hundred years, said many school children, especially those in urban areas, "have absolutely no idea (where their food comes from). They don't realize the effort it took to get that food on their plate," including how many miles it took for it to arrive there, and how safe it might or might not be. "You want to know where your food is coming from," he added.

That very basic desire is what took Josh Viertel, the recently named president of the U.S. chapter of the worldwide Slow Food movement, to Italy 10 years ago to regain a connection to the world he had lost in modern society. "I'd gotten tired of working in a world of words, I wanted to know if I really liked work," he said.

During his time as a shepherd in southern Italy, Mr. Viertel hitched a ride with a weathered old man in a tiny Fiat, who told him, "People really learn by seeing, thinking and touching. It's the holy trinity of knowledge," Mr. Viertel said. "You've come here to touch more." After that, I stopped wearing gloves."

Mr. Viertel said the lack of connection to the earth lies at the heart of the problem with school lunch programs nationwide. Children have no idea what it takes to turn a seed into a tomato or how to turn that tomato into sauce. The lowest bidder in a food service contract is given priority over the foods which may cost more but provide the most nutrition. Only \$2.27 is allotted per child in federal reimbursement funding for school lunches. "What kind of kids do we grow on \$2.27?" he asked.

There is progress. In Margate City, Cape May County, fourth grade teacher Jessica Cuevas coordinates the William H. Ross Intermediate School's Grades 3-5 School Garden, which has been funded through a New Jersey Agriculture "Learning through Gardening" grant.

Mr. Azzara, a Lawrence Township native who until recently served as the outreach coordinator for the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey, has been working with the seven public schools in Lawrence for several years on establishing gardens. This fall, six of the seven schools will have plots up and running.

Since 1919
LAHIERE'S
3 - Course
Prix Fixe Dinner \$32
Monday - Thursday
Located In the Heart of Princeton
* Do not include tax, gratuity or drinks. Expire 4-30-09

NASSAU INN PRINCETON
Enjoy Our Annual
Mother's Day Buffet Brunch
11:30 AM & 2:30 PM
[Click Here For Full Menu](#)
Call For Reservations
609-688-2600

TEN PALMER SQUARE
WWW.NASSAUINN.COM

TOP JOBS
[Post A Job](#)

Seamstress
Princeton Packet - Princeton, NJ

SALESPERSON - AT&T
Princeton Packet -

TOP HOMES
[Place An Ad](#)
\$389,000

At The Lawrenceville School, executive chef Gary Giberson works extensively with local farms and other food service providers, both through the school and through his recently founded Sustainable Fare company, which provides consulting and environmentally responsible food services.

The benefits are clear, Mr. Azzara said, not only in nutrition but in children's attitude toward the environment, as well as their self-esteem and their appreciation for school. "It's about taking care of something besides ourselves," he said.

But a conference alone does not mean there isn't work to be done.

Megan Elsener, policy coordinator at the Community Food Security Coalition, based in Portland, Ore., noted the federal child nutrition reauthorization process evaluated every five years is once more up for review. Established in 1946, she said, "There really haven't been significant improvements since 1966 — but that's what we're going for this year."

Requests include the elimination of reduced-price lunch requirements, which would allow those who qualify to then qualify for free lunches. Also sought are increases in the meal reimbursement rate of \$2.27 by 35 cents per school lunch and 20 cents per school breakfast, totaling \$50 million over five years. And the coalition is seeking authorization for the release of startup grants of up to \$100,000 for schools and districts to establish infrastructure for farm-to-school programs.

For more information about the New Jersey Farm-to-School Network, write to Beth Feehan at bfeehan@comcast.net or call 609-577-5113. For more information about the national Farm-to-School Network, visit farmtoschool.org.



Get latest Local Central Jersey News from CentralJersey.com

[New Jersey Foreclosures](#)

Find Foreclosure Listing Providers. The Online Business Directory. www.business.com

[Repossessed Homes - NJ](#)

Free Search. Repossessed Homes in New Jersey. Prequalify & Buy Today. www.HudExchange.com



ROBBINSVILLE, NJ

Weidel Realtors

[More Details...](#)

TOP CARS

[View More](#)

Featured Vehicles



\$13,315
2005 Pontiac G6

Ads by Google



[NJ Pre-foreclosures](#)

Find Pre-foreclosures in New Jersey Low cost Pre-foreclosure listings www.NJlispensens.com

[Princeton Windrows](#)

Luxury retirement community with the benefit of home ownership www.princetonwindrows.com

[Need A NJ Realtor?](#)

Contact Lisa Pessagno To Make All Your Dreams Come True www.lisapessagno.com

[Warren NJ Real Estate](#)

Receive all MLS Listings of Homes for Sale in Warren, NJ. warrenrealestate.com

Comments

Comments are limited to 200 words or less.

Add your own comments:

Name:

Email:

(optional)

Comments:

Image Verification: (Case sensitive)



Please note by clicking on "Post Comment" you acknowledge that you have read the Terms of Service and the comment you are posting is in compliance with such terms. Although we do not have any obligation to monitor these comments, we reserve the right at all times to check the comments and to remove any information that is unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, profane, indecent or otherwise objectionable to us at our sole discretion, and to disclose any information necessary to satisfy the law, regulation, or government request. We also reserve the right to limit future participation by any user who violates these terms. All threats to systems or site infrastructure shall be assumed genuine in nature and will be reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities

» **Sections**

Homepage
News
Sports
NJ GameOn
Opinions
People
Lifestyle
Entertainment
Dining
Health
Obituaries

» **Blogs**

Princeton Boulevard
NJ Spice
Sprout - Gardening
NJ Wild
The Next Picture Show
Natural Choice
Kids and Nature
Soup for the Soul
The Artful Blogger!
Live Long - Eat Slow
NJ GameON
Channel Surfing


» **Services**

Advertise with us

Print Ads
Online Ads

Free Newsletter
Subscribe to the Newsletter
Make us your homepage

Contact Us
About Us

 [Subscriber to the Newspaper](#)

 [Events Calendar](#)

 [RSS](#)

 [People](#)

» **Local**

Yellow Pages
Classifieds
CentralJersey.com
2009 Central New Jersey Camp
Expo

» **Our Publications**

The Beacon
Cranbury Press
Hillsborough Beacon
Hopewell Valley News
The Lawrence Ledger
The Manville News
The Messenger-Press
The Princeton Packet
The Register-News
South Brunswick Post
Windsor-Hights Herald
TimeOFF - Entertainment

» **Search Site**

Copyright © 2009, Packet Publications Website | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

-----Neha