

Plant-based diet gains ground

By **ANDREA RICH**
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CHAMBERSBURG — When Healthy Eating Adventure proponent Patti Nitterhouse looked across the dining room Wednesday at the 100 people who are or could be changing to a plant-based diet, she described the scene before her as “Grassroots social change in action.”

Nitterhouse, Dr. Liz George and the leadership at the Fulton Center for Sustainable Living are key players in the effort to get Franklin County residents eating better and being healthier. Summit Health is a sponsor of the Adventure as well.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of 2010, 28.6 percent of Pennsylvanians are considered obese by medical standards. In 2009, CDC numbers by county and state show Franklin County has an obesity rate of 31 percent. In Pennsylvania, in 2009, 64 percent of adults had either diabetes or high cholesterol.

The Healthy Eating Adventure is making its way through Franklin County. It started in the south in September in Mercersburg with a group adopting the plant-based diet as outlined in the “Engine 2 Diet” bestseller.

The Adventure — buying the “Engine 2 Diet” book, committing to the diet, having access to volunteer coaches to get answers and recipes, and a weekly plant-based food potluck for 21 days — then moved to Penn National retirement community before its latest stop at Wilson College in Chambersburg.

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Choices for health: Zac Andres serves up a vegetarian meal Wednesday at the healthy eating dinner at Wilson College, Chambersburg. Public Opinion/Ryan Blackwell

Fast facts

It’s called the Engine 2 Diet because triathlete and career firefighter Rip Esselstyn convinced his entire station to adopt a plant-based diet when he learned one of the firefighters had life-threatening cholesterol numbers. Esselstyn fol-

lowed the diet himself on the advice of his father, a doctor.

The program generally begins with a lecture on healthy eating and the chance to buy the Engine 2 Diet book and take part in a plant-based meal. Participants are

assigned a coach to use as a resource, and everyone who can gets together on the same night every week for a potluck of plant-based foods. The potlucks continue monthly in each area that has already had the Adventure.

Diet

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The 21 days concluded this week at Wilson with a chef-prepared meal, all plant-based, and the presentation of graduation certificates.

While most people following the Engine 2 diet reported losing weight, most had goals of improving overall health.

Participants are encouraged to have bloodwork done to know their starting point when taking on the plant-based diet. The goal is that their danger numbers go down.

"I dropped 50 points on cholesterol," one graduate told his fellow adventurers.

"My ldl (low-density lipoprotein or 'bad cholesterol') is down 24 points," another said.

"My husband checks his blood pressure two or three times a day because he just can't believe (how much lower it is)," another said.

Plant-based is just that — a diet of plant-derived foods only. No dairy, no meat, no animal products such as eggs. Oils are not involved in Engine 2 recipes; neither is salt.

According to the Engine 2 Diet website, a person's palate will be recreated to appreciate the true tastes of food without added oils, salt and sauces. Because there is no cholesterol in plant-based foods approved on the diet, participants' cholesterol levels will go down because they are not ingesting anything with cholesterol.

Veterans of the program — there were about a dozen for this latest Adventure that served as coaches — swear by the positive effects. In addition to lower ldl levels and blood pressure, they say they sleep better, have more energy and feel less puffy or bloated day in and day out.

That doesn't mean changing to the Engine 2 Diet is

easy.

Graduates, each given 30 seconds to talk about the biggest impacts of the program for them, said "it's a challenge" to be the only one in a household eating this way. Some also said it was a challenge — especially at first — to find ingredients and find the time to build recipes that use such ingredients as lentils, couscous and quinoa. Others admitted that while on the diet, they let themselves occasionally stray to have a piece of cheese, or an egg.

One participant, upon receiving her diploma, told the group, "I could have done better if I would have done better (following Engine 2)." She said her primary reason for doing the diet is to avoid taking insulin for blood sugar levels, an idea her doctor suggested at a recent visit.

One person's story

Diane Fusting's mother died from a heart attack at 52. Her mother was one of eight children, and Fusting said all of them died between the ages of 50 and 53.

"I just feel like life is a gift, and you wouldn't want to give back a perfectly good gift," Fusting said.

"I feel like I'm trying to eat healthy," Fusting said of starting Engine 2, which she does as a solo project because her husband, she said, is "not a vegetable eater."

Ironically, the Fustings raise free-range chickens and sheep, so they have access to organic meat and eggs, which her husband still enjoys. With the influence of Engine 2, Fusting said she pays much more attention to nitrates, processed foods and flour. While she still makes zucchini bread for her husband, she does so with whole grain flour (not white), and applesauce instead of oil. When he has a bowl of ice cream for a nighttime snack, she has carrots and celery with a bowl of hum-

mus.

"I never thought I'd eat so many beans. Not just beans but quinoa and couscous. It's a whole different perspective," Fusting said.

Since giving up dairy, Fusting said she now realizes she had some level of lactose intolerance.

Fusting said her daughter became a vegan in college.

"I used to tell her, 'You won't get enough protein,'" Fusting said.

Two weeks into the Healthy Eating Adventure, Wilson College edition, Fusting called her daughter and said that on a plant-based diet, "I feel better. My digestion is better; I'm overall better."

Unlike her three siblings, Fusting was not on medication when she started the Engine 2 Diet. She has become an advocate of this lifestyle in her 21 days.

"More people really have to take a closer look at their diets — things like nitrates and flours. I wish restaurants would get on board and not add oil to everything," she said.

The weekly potlucks for the Healthy Eating Adventurers not only gave them time to eat together and share stories and recipes, it gave participants proof that there really is a lot to be taken in by eating this way.

"That first potluck I ate so much, I felt like Thanksgiving! I was a stuffed turkey!" she said. But unlike traditional November holidays past, Fusting said she had no trouble falling asleep that night, and woke up not feeling lethargic from a big meal the night before, but refreshed.

In the 21 days Fusting lost 18 pounds and looks forward to hearing new bloodwork numbers from her doctor.

Living a plant-based diet

When dining out, participants said it's possible to

find places that serve a vegan meal.

Fusting said she planned ahead when she and her husband wanted dinner out. She called EJ's Grill in Chambersburg and told them she'd be in for dinner. She wanted a meal with no meat or animal products, no oil and no salt. When she got there they were ready, she said, and her dinner was "delicious."

One participant said she vacationed with family during this Adventure, and made some of her own food to take, so she could eat according to the diet.

Dr. George said Summit Health will prepare Engine 2 Diet-approved meals for patients if requested, mentioning it because one Adventurer has a planned surgery with a hospital stay coming up.

Living a plant-based diet can add hours to a grocery store trip, several said.

"It's reading all those labels!" they explained.

George, whom Nitterhouse considers the healthy eating pioneer for Franklin County, said near the conclusion of Wednesday's event that eating a plant-based diet doesn't have to involve a lot of labels.

"If it has a label, I don't buy it," she said, giving examples of fresh fruits, vegetables and dried legumes as items she puts in her grocery cart. "If it has more than two items on the label, I don't take it," she said.

According to the official Engine 2 Diet site (engine2diet.com), a plant-based diet can provide all the necessary calcium and protein for the body, which is a common argument for not giving up dairy or meat. It also offers enough fuel to power a competitive athlete and a growing child, the site promises.

George and Nitterhouse intend to keep the Adventure moving through Franklin County by planning the next 21-day event for the Shippensburg area.



Healthy Eating Adventurers program coaches speaking to the group during dinner and graduation ceremonies for eighteen participants and their families and friends.

Mercersburg Healthy Eating graduates celebrate accomplishments

Plant-based Eating program offers something for everyone ages 2-80

Eighteen graduates of the 28-day Healthy Eating Adventure met with their family, friends, supporters and coaches at a celebratory meal on Thursday, October 31 at Flannery's Tavern on the Square. What were they celebrating? A month-long dedication to a wellness program centered on flavorful plant-based eating including shopping, meal preparation, sharing food and recipes at potlucks, and yes - even ordering meals at restaurants.

Jeremy Jones, head chef at Flannery's, crafted a four-course plant-based meal for the participants which was creative as well as nutritious.

The latest Mercersburg Healthy Eating Adventure began with a kickoff presentation by Dr. Neal Barnard at Mercersburg Academy on September 26. Dr. Barnard, author of *Power Foods for The Brain*, is a nutrition researcher, health advocate, and founder of Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). He spoke to an audience of more than 350 people about the benefits of a plant-based diet for the brain in the prevention of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Those present at the lecture and the plant-based meal that followed had the opportunity to sign up for a "Healthy Eating Adventure," a guided program that pairs participants with a coach and links them with a community for support and sharing of progress and recipes. Thirty-two individuals took on the challenge of plant-based eating for 28 days. They were paired with one of five coaches, who included Kenn Speaks, Patti Nitterhouse, Tanya Nitterhouse, Carolynne Kelly and Marilyn Houck. The coaches communicated with their teams regularly and met them one night per week for a community potluck meal.

Healthy Eating Adventures have been occurring in neighboring communities for the last three years. They are the brainchild of Dr. Elizabeth George, in response to the challenges of maintaining a healthy lifestyle presented by the widespread availability and consumption of fast and other "convenience" foods, high in refined flours, sugars and fats. The Healthy Eating Adventures program supports participants in taking on a wholefoods, plant-based diet; it expands the intake of vegetables, fruits, grains and legumes and leaves out

animal products, extruded oils, refined sugars and processed ingredients, and excess sodium. It is essentially an eating style patterned after the ground-breaking research of Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, who worked with former President Bill Clinton to get him on track towards a healthy lifestyle following his bypass surgery.

"Numerous research articles and books by physicians such as Caldwell Esselstyn, John McDougal, Dean Ornish, and Pam Popper describe the many medical benefits that patients achieve after just weeks of following a wholefoods, plant-based eating plan. So much so, that insurance companies are starting to reimburse participation in their intensive programs. It should be no surprise then to hear the wonderful results our participants describe at their 'graduation.' However, even after nine adventures since our first with Rip Esselstyn in 2010, I still feel amazed at the incredible difference something as basic as eating this way can make," said Dr. George, reflecting on the recent Healthy Eating Adventure.

Participants join Healthy Eating Adventures from a variety of perspectives: from those struggling with the serious effects of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, or other ailments, to those who are concerned about their future health due to high cholesterol in their families, to those who just want to be more aware of the effects of their dietary choices. Some want to lose weight or increase their energy level, and others want to join a community of people to share meals and companionship.

At the graduation dinner, the graduates received a certificate of recognition from their coach, and were invited to speak about their experiences with the program. They also filled out a survey reporting their results. Most reported improvements in the way they feel and look - including weight loss, increased energy, and more confidence and excitement in trying new things. They are happy they do not have to count calories or restrict portion sizes, because they feel naturally full and satisfied with the colorful bounty of flavors and textures that whole foods provide.

Measuring lab work is important to quantify the effects of the program. In addition to an increased sense of wellness, people consistently report improved cholesterol levels, and are able to reduce or

eliminate their medications by working with their physicians. Participants commonly experience increased digestive regularity and function, decreased arthritis pain, and improvement of blood glucose. Three participants have reported reversal of fatty liver, and one stated that her lupus arthritis and nephropathy have reversed.

Dr. George summed up the medical benefits of healthy eating: "Best of all, participants have the fabulous experience of being in control of their own wellbeing."

Many graduates spoke about the role their family plays in their decision to embark upon and maintain a healthy plant-based lifestyle. Participant Carrie Gray said, "My two-year old son. He's the #1 reason I'm here. I thought about doing this for years, but it wasn't enough to do it just for me. I want to be healthier for him."

Coach Patti Nitterhouse said, "We are all role models for those around us. Some of us are fortunate to have our whole family's support in this lifestyle, but others have spouses who are skeptical or don't want to give up the 'meat and potatoes.' But everyone is affected by the behavior they see around them, and they will be influenced by you, by your experiences and how you are benefiting. That in turn will benefit them."

Healthy Eating Adventures are supported in part by a grant from Summit Endowment, which has identified nutrition as one of its four priorities from the 2013 Community Health Needs Assessment. The specific objective is to increase the amount of fresh vegetables and fruits consumed by Franklin County individuals aged two and above as well as their families. By promoting the benefits of local, fresh fruits and vegetables and supporting the local farmers who produce them, Healthy Eating Adventures are well aligned with this objective.

Several locations including Wilson College, Penn National Golf Course and Mercersburg host monthly potlucks to sustain the community adventure, and the schedule for these is available online. Please visit the Healthy Eating Adventure website at healthyeatingadventure.org or email eat4thehealthofit@yahoo.com for more information on the next Community Adventure in Healthy Eating and to sign up for the newsletter, with delicious plant-based recipes and informative articles.

Pure and Simple Café owner Kathy Pentz described the meals – shown is the entrée of roasted stuffed pepper with lentils, barley and vegan Italian sausage; micro green salad; and beet-pineapple compote – garnished with edible nasturtium bloom!

“Community Adventure in Healthy Eating” class graduates



Congratulations to the many members of our community who are really taking on healthy eating habits! Lots of people are switching to all whole grains, many are avoiding fast foods, and plenty are feeling great off their sodas and sugary drinks.

For some people, making changes a step at a time is what works. For the 43 people who joined this fall’s “Community Adventure in Healthy Eating” series, jumping wholeheartedly into all whole foods, plant-based eating has been life changing!

The group, including people from Mercersburg, Chambersburg, West Virginia, Camp Hill and Hagerstown, joined the 28-Day Challenge after hearing Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn lecture last month at Mercersburg Academy. He gave a powerful message about how the foods we choose to eat are key to our health.

“Wholefoods, Plant Strong” means choosing from the vast variety of whole grains, legumes, veggies, and fruits. These foods

add up to a great number of tastes and meals; they are actually less limiting than the “meat and potatoes” meal plan – and more colorful!

Why the emphasis on these foods? Population studies, such as the ongoing Nurses Study and the Seventh Day Adventist population, on rates of cancer and heart disease, all point to the benefits of a diet high in fruits and vegetables, grains, legumes, and low in fats from animal products and processed foods. The Mediterranean Diet, American Heart Association DASH diet, and the recent USDA dietary recommendations – all emphasize increasing these groups.

Dr. Esselstyn showed that by really sticking with this, it is possible to get reversal of arterial obstruction. Dr. Neal Barnard has worked with the same eating plan to achieve reversal of type 2 diabetes.

Participants in the Community Adventure in Healthy (See HEALTHY... page 4)



Healthy...

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Eating met at Pure and Simple on November 3rd for a graduation dinner and received their diplomas. The meal was a treat for the palate and colorful!

Here’s what participants told their fellow graduates:

“The sharing of food, recipes and personal stories (at the weekly potlucks), was great support for this diet and lifestyle. The professional advice and Q&A were very informative and fun” – Eric Kelly

“Plant Perfect now for 60 days. Have lost 35 pounds and still going” – Terry Hart

“I’m learning more dishes for myself & 9 year old daughter. Loved *Engine 2 Diet*; the recipes are very easy to prepare and taste wonderful. I’m buying

the books as Christmas gifts [available at Modnur Pharmacy]” – Colleen Farrell

“Being plant-strong is surprisingly easy and the general health improvements are amazing! Reaching for a big plate of veggies, even when stressed out, doesn’t result in that fat, bloated, sluggish feeling the next day” – added another class member.

Participants noted weight loss, resolved indigestion, improved cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose, and improved energy.

One of our septuagenarian coaches, who started with last year’s Community Adventure with Rip Esselstyn, says, “I have more energy every day. I am

physically stronger; lifting 37 lb. bags of dog food is easy now... I feel much younger and healthier... I have better balance and move much better, with no aches or pains. I found a remarkable improvement in memory. And (best of all) I have had fun with wonderful new foods and flavors that seem to me like “Food as preventative medicine”!!!

Many thanks to the program coordinators and coaches for giving time and energy to create a fun Adventure in Healthy Eating and for making a big difference in the lives of many!! Questions about the program and whole food, plant strong eating can be emailed to eat4thehealthofit@yahoo.com

Thursday, January 5, 2012

▼FAYETTEVILLE

Healthy eating program set for Penn National

Staff report

The Penn National Community is offering local residents help in making good on New Year's resolutions to lose weight or eat healthier.

Penn National Golf Course Community is hosting a 28-day program that teaches participants how to choose and prepare healthy foods for a lifetime of wellness.

In the previous year, Penn National has hosted a farmers market offering locally grown fresh foods, and hosted a satellite event for the Mason Dixon Heart Walk.

"The Healthy Eating Adventure is another opportunity for residents and the surrounding community to educate themselves and empower people to have the healthiest 2012 possible," said Patti Nitterhouse, vice president of White Rock Inc., and developer of Penn National Golf Course Community.

The Healthy Eating

Adventure kicks off Jan. 25 at the Penn National Clubhouse, with an information program led by Dr. Liz George, sponsored in conjunction by Summit Health, Mont Alto Fire Company, and Fayetteville Volunteer Fire Company.

A family doctor in Mercersburg, George became involved in the Community Healthy Eating Adventure after reading an article by the concept's founder, Rip Esselstyn.

After corresponding about the perceived lack of resources in small towns, Esselstyn and George met with a group of 10 community members and created this project, aimed at helping local people learn to cook and eat a heart-healthy, plant-based diet.

The Jan. 25 event, which includes dinner, is free and open to the public. Those interested in taking part in the event can register by e-mailing iwood@pennhomes.com.

Program on eating a plant-based diet

By **Jordan Krom**

Dr. Neal Barnard stopped by the Burgin Center for the Arts at Mercersburg Academy on Sept. 26 to deliver his lecture "Power Foods for the Brain" to an audience that could not have been more excited to listen.

Dr. Liz George introduced Dr.

Barnard as a man with a long list of accomplishments, including the many newspapers and TV shows to which he's contributed, as well as his being the founder and president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). The man of the hour came onstage to cheers and

applause before diving right into his presentation.

Dr. Barnard started off his talk telling the audience about his grandparents and how they and his father all suffered from Alzheimer's once they hit their 60s. His sad story of how drastically the disease changed their lives, as well as the lives of everyone around them, took him into the discussion of memory. The doctor explained how memory works and how common issues with memory are becoming in our society today, ranging from mild lapses to full-blown Alzheimer's.

Dr. Barnard said that despite how grim the diagnosis seems, there is a way to combat these diseases and keep your mind sharp and healthy, even when you believe you're destined to be afflicted.

"Genes are not destiny," Dr. Barnard said, speaking of the gene responsible for Alzheimer's. He compared the Alzheimer's gene to a committee, where the gene merely makes suggestions, as opposed to other genes that are more like dictators, such as your eye color. "We're having an epidemic of Alzheimer's," he said gravely, "and it's going to get worse."

(See DR. BARNARD... page 5)



Dr. Neal Barnard signs books for eager fans outside the theater about 20 minutes before the talk is scheduled to begin.

Photo by Jordan Krom

Dr. Barnard...

(Continued from page 1)

Dr. Barnard then described a series of tests done on groups of people in Chicago over a number of years, and how scientists monitored what they ate and how much of certain things they consumed on a daily basis, such as saturated fats. He showed that people who ate healthier, plant-based diets were much less likely to get Alzheimer's, even if they had the gene, than those who chose to eat an unhealthy diet that included meat and dairy.

He also spoke about certain metals that should be consumed in certain small amounts, mainly iron and copper. While the body uses those in small amounts, too much can lead to an unhealthy brain. The same sort of topic was touched upon with aluminum, which is present in certain foods and occasionally in water due to its use in water treatment plants. However, the body does not need any aluminum, and as it also is a large contributor to Alzheimer's, one should be careful to avoid it.

Dr. Barnard also talked about vitamins, and how it is usually much better to get them from food as opposed to pills. He continued to stress that a plant-based diet, free of meat and dairy, is the key to a long and healthy life. "Simple foods without the bad fats, lots of nutrition, will protect you," he

told the audience.

He also advised getting involved in plenty of physical activity, as it is proven to reverse brain shrinkage and improve memory. Intellectual exercise is also important for a healthy mind. Dr. Barnard recommended watching documentaries, reading newspapers, and doing puzzles daily to help keep your brain in shape.

Throughout the presentation, Dr. Barnard told several success stories of people who followed the various plans written out in his books, as well as a few pioneers who discovered how to live healthily all on their own. Dr. Barnard gave two steps to get audience members on their way to starting a healthy diet: first, everyone should at least check out the possibilities of healthy food that he or she actually wants to eat. Once that is done, he recommended trying an entirely plant-based diet for three weeks, using transition foods like veggie burgers if necessary.

He then ended the talk with a sobering fact: "The people who need this message the most are not in this room." Dr. Barnard said that children around the age of eight are currently at an extremely high risk for diseases like obesity and diabetes, and that everyone needs to "make more noise" to get the message of healthy eating to spread.

Following the presentation, a dinner called "Savor the Fabulous Flavors of a Heart-

Healthy Meal" was held in the Ford Dining Hall just across campus. The meal was a colorful variety of vegan dishes, including sweet potato lasagna and vegan meatloaf. A table of delectable vegan desserts was available as well, such as vegan chocolate cake and a few varieties of vegan cookies.

As the dinner wound down to an end, Dr. George held a short presentation about the Healthy Eating Adventure Program that included testimonials from members Nick Lula and Adam Leeper. Dr. George again talked about the importance of getting children into healthy eating habits as soon as possible.

One controversial issue with Dr. Barnard recommending a vegan diet to the residents of Franklin County is that dairy is a large part of the economy in the area, and has been for quite some time. After the dinner and on the way out, Dr. Barnard was able to be reached for comment.

When asked for some advice on how this area's residents should go about living a vegan lifestyle, Dr. Barnard said, "The message is the same no matter where you are." He said that the body always does best with vegetables no matter what area you are from. "We're all in this together," he concluded with a smile.

For more information about the Healthy Eating Adventure Program, visit www.healthyeatingadventure.org. To learn more about PCRM, please visit www.pcrm.org

NUTRITION

Healthy Eating Adventure series begins a new year

Dr. Liz George shares own adventure, success with food

Staff report

FAYETTEVILLE » A new series of potluck suppers and talks about healthy eating habits will begin Jan. 13, with a free lecture by Dr. Liz George, Mercersburg.

The 6 p.m. lecture will open the 2015 Healthy Eating Adventure in Founders Grille, Penn National Golf Course, 3720 Clubhouse Drive, Fayetteville.

Dr. George will talk on the topic of “a research-based revolution in healthy eating.” Dinner will follow at 7. Reservations are required.

The healthy eating program states that participants can lose cravings for

sugar, salt and fat, lower their blood pressure, lose body fat and normalize blood sugar by following the prescribed eating habits. Participants receive help from a coach and ongoing support from one another.

Upcoming HEA events:

- “Kitchen Makeover,” talk, Jan. 20
- “Learn and Share” weekly potluck dinners Jan. 27-Feb. 10
- Celebrate success gathering Feb. 17

To reserve seats for the Jan. 13 dinner, visit tinyurl.com/HEAjan2015, email ppeck@pennhomes.com or call 352-3046.

Cost is \$15 online or at the door.

Healthy Eating Adventures is a free community service of MacWell.