

BMCC Food and Fitness Initiative is a success

By Lori Mills
For Bay Mills News

BAYMILLS — The Bay Mills Community College Land Grant Department has been collaborating this past year with several departments in an effort to educate and assist individuals with chronic health issues towards leading healthier lifestyles. They held a celebratory banquet with foods they grew themselves recently.

The program, called Bay Mills Food and Fitness Initiative, is a Tribal College Extension grant project that is funded by the USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture. Its purpose is to provide opportunities for people struggling with chronic health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, and weight control.

The program duration is longer than some others offered in the past with the hopes that the lifestyle changes will be more long lasting. Once the potential participants are identified, they are offered use of the three-year grant program free of charge, or at a very reasonable cost, through BMCC.

The Bay Mills Medical Center first identified individuals who could benefit from the program. The program contracts with two registered dietitians, Charla Gordan and Betty Noland from the EUP Registered Dietitians, who conduct a course in nutrition education called Fresh Tracks. They met once a week at the Mukwa Health and Fitness center during the winter and spring with participants. The dietitians also led supermarket tours, reading labels with partici-

pants to help them better understand what the information on the labels means. They taught cooking classes and took tours of the Sault Ste. Marie farmers' markets as well.

The fitness center also offered walking groups and activities such as Zumba to teach the physical education aspect. John Krentz, the Health and Fitness Department chair at BMCC, helped coordinate these activities.

Participants' health was monitored throughout the entire process. Dr. MaryAnne Shannon, a registered nurse, conducted the health assessments while Krentz and student workers at the fitness center calculated the percentages of body fat.

Lake Superior State University offered use of their indoor track for cardio respiratory endurance assessments as well.

Throughout this year, significant success has been recorded; blood sugars are more controlled, BMI's and weight are dropping, cardio respiratory endurance has improved, blood pressure and cholesterol are better. Participants' overall health has greatly improved thus far as a direct result from people becoming more active and eating with improved nutritional values.



Above, Shianne Parish shows off part of the green bean harvest. Below, Diane Teeple, Millie and Levi Carrick (L-R) help prepare the celebration feast.



Another key component of the program is led by Aaron Tadgerson, the land grant coordinator, who will be working with K-12 students in the entire EUP trying to get them interested and more involved in the sciences. Not only will he work with local area schools, Tadgerson hopes to help BMCC build on relationships with four-year universities to improve the quality of their academic programs. He currently works with Michigan State, University of Michigan, and LSSU to transfer students into the sciences with a more practical experience such as lab work and gardening.

Participants in this initiative not only learn how to eat healthy, but learn how to grow nutritional food in the process.

BMCC has acquired 40 acres of land on Mills Road for use as an agricultural property. They are currently trying to develop the land as an agri-science property. Participants worked with Dr. Larry Dyer, MSU Extension Educator in learning how to grow a vegetable

garden.

Each person had their own garden plot marked off and transplanted plants from the greenhouse and seed directly into the ground. They made out their plan for the garden, and then met once a week for planting, weeding, and harvesting of their own crops.

BMCC student Tammi Proulx was a very important part of this portion of the project in coordinating activities and communicating information back and forth.

Currently, Bay Mills Construction is preparing the site for a garage, a driveway, and a parking lot next to the garden. They have already built a fence around the garden to keep out animals and the garage will be complete before winter hits. The garage will have electricity and, in the spring, a well for water.

The use of the main campus greenhouse and a hoop house at the West Campus (which use passive solar energy for heat) helps prolong the growing season into December.

Casey Munz, BMCC sustainable agriculture coordinator and Bill LeBlanc, BMCC student agricultural assistant from the Land Grant Department, did a lot of the work in

the garden and have recently put in a fall cover crop. Dick Timmer, BMCC construction consultant, was responsible for the ground preparation by tilling and running water to the site; he is also overseeing the construction of the garage at the site this fall.

"We hope to improve the quality of soil in the garden now through next spring for a better harvest next growing season," said Steve Yanni, director of the program.

"Our long term goal is to develop this property to supply as much food as possible for the Bay Mills community, and hopefully create a few jobs in the process," he added.

"One of the underlying motivations for tribal and college leadership to support this program was to help reduce the incidence rate of lifestyle dependent diseases, and to generally motivate a healthier community."

Next summer, staff hope to see animals on the property — possibly chickens, cattle, and hogs — to make those foods available to the community also.

"We hope to identify new participants and hope to see the current participants again next year," concluded Yanni.
