

Elementary program reinstated

Kitchen managers cope with diverse tastes

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

When it's lunchtime in Farmington area schools, some students cast longing thoughts toward the prospect of their next home-cooked meal. Other students and faculty members take a different look at the situation, vowing that they really enjoy the food in their school cafeteria.

Students can play down 50 cents for meals which include a main dish, vegetable and milk. Teachers pay \$1 for the meal and a la carte items are slightly higher. The hot lunch program, which is featured in the high schools and the junior highs will be extended to the elementary schools in Farmington, in September 1978, according to District Business Mgr. William Prisk.

And it'll be up to Food Coordinator Marie Ritchie to make sure that the Farmington School District's food

lockers are kept filled to accommodate the additional demand.

A member of the Farmington school's kitchen staff for 20 years, Mrs. Ritchie started out as a kitchen helper.

"I love baking. I miss that," she said.

NOW, AS THE HEAD OF the district's kitchens, she works with her nine managers, setting prices. Each of the schools participating in the hot lunch program has its own kitchen manager.

"The managers decide on the menus based on what the students in their schools like," she said.

Each manager is trained through the intermediate school district in the county and by the state. Last year, they served 18,000 lunches, excluding a la carte items.

Students are served a combination of convenience foods and items made

from scratch in the school kitchens. Some commodities are received from the federal government's school lunch program.

"We make things from bread to beef stew. We bake bread and rolls," Mrs. Ritchie said.

Menus include hot roast beef sandwiches, macaroni and cheese, fish sandwiches and spaghetti. Hot dogs and hamburgers are available at every lunch.

Most students are partial to the pizza dishes, which are served as part of the regular hot meal or a la carte.

Although it has a lot of variety, the program breaks even financially.

IN 1975, the school lunch program took in \$467,000. That year, expenditures amounted to \$445,000, according to Prisk. Last year, the program received \$308,000 and spent \$304,000.

"It pays for itself," said Prisk. But he has doubts about the district's lunch program breaking even after the elementary schools rejoin the program.

The elementary school hot lunch program was discontinued five years ago because most of the children eat at home or brown bag it, according to Prisk.

"A lot of the mothers want to see their children at lunch time," Prisk explained.

And it's also a question of economics. I know that a sandwich can be built cheaper at home," he said.

Extending the hot lunch program to the elementary schools is required by a state law. Complying with the rule will involve replacing a few items in

the elementary school kitchens and the hiring of about 50 additional employees, according to Prisk.

Most of the kitchen equipment from the previous program is still in storage. Few of the items were discarded because they were worn. Others have been used throughout the years to replace worn items for the high school kitchens and the kitchens that serve Farmington Training Center and the Cloverale Center.

EACH ELEMENTARY school has its own kitchen which will be pulled out of retirement. Some kitchens have seen a second life as storage areas, art workshops and science rooms.

When the program goes into effect, the elementary kitchens will be oper-

ated in a slightly different manner than the others.

High school and junior high kitchens are in the same building as the classrooms. Each has its own food storage and freezers as well as stoves and other kitchen equipment. The food is prepared in the individual kitchens.

In the elementary program, the food will be prepared at a central kitchen in Larkshire Elementary School. Food will be reheated in the different elementary schools' satellite kitchens.

Any food that is prepared for a large number of diners in satellite kitchens or on the scene are bound to run into some criticism.

"I heard much criticism but you have to take into account that the capabilities are limited," Prisk said.

"I've eaten at least one of everything on the menu that was prepared in the satellite kitchens. I've eaten a lot of institutional food, so maybe I've adapted. But I had no complaints except for one meal. And I've forgotten what it was."

"BUT IT WAS BAD," he said.

Kitchen managers echo Prisk's judgment of the food they serve. They and the school principals are staunch spokesmen and defendants of the kitchen's products.

"School food isn't going to taste like it does at home," admitted East Junior High's Kitchen Manager Marion Bush.

"We start preparation of the food at 8:30 a.m. Some of the dishes are prepared the day before and stored. We have to do that since our labor was cut."

"I don't hear any complaints about the food. I think it's very good," she said.

"I happen to know that East serves excellent hamburgers. We hold them in their juice, so they don't get dry," she said.

East Principal Gil Henderson is firm in the belief that the school's chili is better than that found in a restaurant.

"I'm not a picky eater. I was a cook for three years in college and I've prepared and eaten everything," he said.

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Terry Hall (left) and Jane Mather enjoy eating their lunches at the Farmington High School cafeteria. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)



Barry Spgeleest, Farmington High senior, works in the school kitchen during lunch break. Most of the school's canned food is stored in a walk-in food locker.

Students rate hot lunch

School cafeteria fare has a long way to go before it replaces home cooking, but some institutional kitchens are managing to close the culinary gap.

Farmington student favorites such as pizza, hamburgers and hot dogs are set out to tempt the temperamental taste buds of teens.

These attempts at keeping up with the McDonalds have achieved varying stages of success. Some have fallen flat while others are kindly received by students.

Hot dogs and hamburgers are daily items on school menus, but some students pull thumbs down on the effort.

"The hamburgers look like hockey pucks," said East Junior High eighth grader Jackie Roberts.

"The junk food is good, but the stuff that's good for you is never hot," added Barb Wilken, an eighth grade student at East.

Kitchen managers in the high schools are aware that students who complain about the food are liable to take advantage of the high school's open campus and indulge in some fast food.

SOME OF THE SCHOOLS HAVE countered the move to take out lunches by making the cafeteria less institutional.

Harrison High School has painted its lunchroom orange, red and yellow. Farmington High's student council has come up with a new gimmick for relieving lunch time blabs. They've installed a juke box to burst out rock and roll at meal time.

In the midst of the noise of students gathering and the music blaring, two Farmington students sit quietly enjoying their lunch.

"I like to eat here. The food's good. I like the macaroni and cheese and the vegetables and the cole slaw. I like the spaghetti lunches. The ladies in the kitchen are so nice," said Jane Mather, a senior.

"I think the food's good here," said Terry Hall, a junior and member of the school's baseball, wrestling and football teams.

"I'm not a picky eater," he said.

"The variety here is good. You know, they make their own spaghetti sauce here."

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Farmington High School students devour lunch in the school's cafeteria. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)