

Food industry critic links diet to disease

By DIANE SANDS

If the adage you are what you eat is true, Americans are a conglomeration of junk foods, according to Michael Jacobson, Ph.D. and noted critic of the food industry.

Dr. Jacobson, a founder and presently co-director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C., was the keynote speaker at the Michigan State Dietitians' Convention held Thursday (Oct. 24) at the Troy Hilton.

Dr. Jacobson informed more than 400 dietitians attending the convention of the relation between disease and diet in America and of the steps that health professionals and other concerned individuals can take to remedy the situation. "The foods which we eat are directly related to the high incidence of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and intestinal cancer common in Americans," he said.

"Older persons are now suffering from the effects of foods which they have eaten during their lifetime. Although the food substances are not poisonous in small amounts, years of over consumption can lead to many unnecessary illnesses.

"AS A PREVENTIVE measure, Americans should make changes in their diets now. Eat less sugar, saturated fats and salt. Substitute unhealthy foods with

natural foods whole grain cereals, unbleached flour, fresh fruits, vegetables and dairy products," he said.

Dr. Jacobson advises a break in the sugar habit which comprises 20 percent of the average American diet.

"We don't need any added sugar in our diets. The natural sugar in fruits and vegetables can replace the empty calories found in junk foods," he said.

He compares the "junk food" promoted on television to a dope peddler trying to addict children, but lacking the public indignation which has accompanied the awareness of the drug problem.

"Momma and the food industry are killing us with their pre-packaged meals," said Jacobson.

From the time a person is born he is fed a bill of goods. Starting with baby formula desserts, which give infants a taste for sugar, followed by sugar coated cereals and later empty calories offered at fast

food chains and unhealthy snack foods, like soda pop and chips, the average American learns only the pleasant tasting aspects of junk foods, not the harmful effects they can cause during the course of a lifetime.

"COMPANIES ARE making money through poor nutrition. Corporations wield tremendous amounts of influence on government regulation of the food industry. The annual advertising budget for General Foods tops \$180 million, three times as large as the budget allocated for the Food and Drug Administration," said Jacobson.

"The influence of the food industry is obvious when 22 out of 52 of the top FDA administrators came to government from the food industry and later plan to return to jobs with the same corporations which they now regulate," he said. Jacobson blames the major reason for the unhealthy food habits of Americans on the food indus-

try's substituting new products for natural foods which tend to be less profitable.

Using corn flakes as an example, he explained that the basic product had no competitive selling value. Market researchers felt sugar frosted flakes would have more appeal to youngsters and they were introduced to supermarket shelves at an increased price.

To expand the market further, pink frosted flakes were invented. In addition to being sugar coated, pink food color was added to the cornflakes, making them more appealing to a child's eye and at the same time taking the product further from its natural state, creating more shelf space for the manufacturer and providing the cereal company with a reason for another increase in price.

Another unfortunate fact is that these cereals, strategically played to catch the child's eye while mother shops for weekly groceries,

may contain more sugar than cereal at this point of the selling game, he said.

THE CHANGE in American eating habits began during the shift of population from country to city during World War II. It was at this time that food scientists began to successfully experiment with what can be added to or removed from foods, explained the author.

Jacobson suggested that change must come about at a local level. He encouraged groups to convince restaurants and supermarkets to offer more healthy foods to consumers. At least half of the snack food in vending machines could be healthy food. Instead of only offering chocolate bars and cookies, a selection of raisins, nuts and dried fruits could be made available.

The fast food chains which are becoming aware of criticism from

consumer groups have instituted salad bars to balance the picture of burgers and shakes, he said. Jacobson hopes that in the near future the chains will also offer a pre-packaged health food meals which would include wheat bun, meat or cheese, fruit and fresh vegetable.

Jacobson, often referred to as the Ralph Nader of the food industry, did actually work with Nader for a year before he and two other colleagues formed the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

A 1965 graduate of the University of Chicago, with an AB in chemistry, Jacobson has spent time studying biology at the University of California, San Diego, and earned a doctorate in microbiology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969.

His best known publications are "Nutrition Scoreboard," "The Consumer's Factbook of Food Additives" and the "Eater's Digest."

Bazaar to benefit mentally retarded

Northwest Child Rescue Women (NCRW) Junior League will sponsor its major fund-raiser, a second annual holiday gift bazaar from 11

a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 19 at Knob-in-the-Wood Clubhouse, 20800 Knob Woods Drive in Southfield.

Gift items for Christmas and Chanukah from \$1 to \$36 will be on sale.

These include handcrafted novelties, piggy banks, flashlights, aprons, wrapping paper, address books, pill boxes, stationery for children and adults and terry cloth guest towels.

Northwest Child Rescue Women Junior League is an adjunct of the Northwest Child Rescue Women, Senior League, now in its 26th year.

The Junior League was founded in 1971 with 18 members.

It was created to carry on the philosophies and achievements of the original group.

The purpose is to aid mentally retarded Jewish individuals in the metropolitan Detroit and Oakland County areas.

THE JUNIOR LEAGUE is the only group which supports a program for such elementary age children.

This program includes a two and one-half hour social and recreational program in art, swimming and gym at the Jewish Community Center every Sunday afternoon.

Adell Magdall of Lathrup Village is president of NCRW Junior League.

Board members include Carol Yost and Ruth Kleuger of Farmington and Joanne Arkin, Janice Sher and Carole Kaftan of Southfield.

Others are Francine Gold and Francine Gorenstein of Southfield.

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