

Province steers diners to healthy options

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The time spent poring over a restaurant menu could get longer, but with healthy benefits, if local eateries sign on to a new provincial program.

Last week, the Ministry of Health announced a \$1.9 million investment in the new Informed Dining program, where the nutritional information commonly found on food packaging in the store could soon be coming to a restaurant menu near you.

Across the province, participating restaurants will add the Informed Dining program logo and a statement on their menu or ordering board to let customers know nutritional information – highlighting calorie and sodium content – is available upon request.

But while voluntary for independent eateries, the program is mandatory for health care facilities.

“Retail food service establishments in health care facilities serve vulnerable populations, including patients and families/friends with chronic disease,” said ministry spokesperson Laura Neufeld. “In addition, as a province, we want to role model best practices in provincially funded facilities to set the example and hopefully motivate others to follow suit.”

Due to the process that has to be followed when dealing with existing contracts, there won’t be much changed locally with patient food services until at least next 2012 or 2013, explained Steve Raper, Northern Health director of communications.

“We’ll be working towards implementing the entire program,” Raper



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When dining out, consumers could have the chance to learn what the calorie and sodium levels in their meals are through a new provincial program.

said. “Consultation with our food service people and contract providers have to take place.”

Food service is something health care professionals are interested in, though it can be a challenge.

“We have to provide for a number of people and healthy food and tastes don’t always collide,” Raper said.

Finding those areas where a healthy diet and a satisfied palette mesh is part of the impetus behind the province’s program, which aims to provide people with informed options.

“Cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer are estimated to cost our system between \$730 million and \$830 million per year – obesity and high blood pressure are major factors in these diseases. By providing nutrition information in restaurants, we hope to help British Columbians make the healthy choice the easy

choice,” said Neufeld.

But while providing the necessary information is important, ultimately making the decision to eat healthier is up to the consumer, said Julie Lau. Lau is a registered dietitian and the program manager for the Health Check B.C. Dining Program, which is responsible for the little green logos sometimes found in grocery stores and on restaurant menus.

“I think consumers want that information. Then they can say ‘I do care about it today’ or ‘I don’t care about it today,’” Lau said. “By providing the information, you’re putting power in their hands.”

Also a voluntary program offered through the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and Yukon, Health Check requires participating restaurants to submit recipes for evaluation which are sent to labs to test for the nutrients.

Local restaurateurs said they are intrigued, but that the details were still too fuzzy.

“We have fresh food here,” said Nelia Fraser, co-owner of Cariboo Restaurant. “Like, if it’s a baked potato, I don’t know what [the nutritional information] is. Unless it’s frozen, like fast food, how do we know?”

That sentiment was echoed by Matt Maritsas at Mr. Jake’s Steakhouse.

“How would I figure it out?” Maritsas asked. “Major corporations have their stats, but how do we determine my stats?”

But even though he said customers have never openly questioned the nutritional content of their menu, Maritsas said he would participate in the program, as would Fraser.

“I like it,” Fraser said. “Then we would know too.”

Stylist school saddened by being cutoff

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The owner of a Prince George hair-styling school that has lost access to the province’s financial assistance program for her students says she took extra steps to try and make sure her pupils were paying their loans.

Loxx Academy of Hair Design owner Cathleen Sindaco said Friday there were times when she would visit a student’s home when she received a letter from the StudentAidBC program about someone who was not keeping up payments.

However, Sindaco said the task was “kind of out of our hands” because many of her students come from communities outside Prince George, drawn to the school by the comparatively low tuition fee.

“I’d have done anything to save the designation,” Sindaco said.

From 2006 to 2009, the default rate rose from 45.6 to 60.2 per cent, prompting the Ministry of Advanced Education to impose in July 2010 a two-year ban on giving loans to the school’s students, meaning Loxx has at least a year to go before it can regain access.

Sindaco estimated 60 per cent of her students received loans from the province – paying prime plus 2.5 per cent for floating rate and prime plus five per

cent for fixed rate loans – prior to the ministry’s decision.

The school continues to operate but has seen about 30 fewer students enrol over the past year, a 20-30 per cent drop.

Those who need help are being encouraged to turn to the banks, where Sindaco said they can get better deals in the first place, although some simply do not have a high enough credit rating to qualify for a loan.

“We’ve got another 12 students for September and we have students lined up for November,” Sindaco said, adding the school operates on a continual-intake basis.

“You have to deal so many months in advance, you have to always be looking and working.”

Sindaco said expecting schools like her to follow up on student loans is onerous but is resigned to the current system.

“It’s the government’s sand box and in order to be in their sand box, you have to play by their rules, so creating waves doesn’t seem to be helping,” Sindaco said.

In a statement issued this week, Advanced Education Minister Naomi Yamamoto said the idea behind the current arrangement is meant to ensure a “shared goal” between the schools and the government: “To ensure students have the support necessary to both complete their desired program and be successful in their career goals over the long term.”

Culinary event aimed at infants

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A group of Prince George youth is crafting healthy meal plan for babies that is sure to please kids and parents alike.

And they will be sharing their idea, called the B.C. Baby Event, at the Youth Around Prince Friends Kitchen Tuesday afternoon.

“A group of local youth, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, came together for a project for them to develop that promotes healthy living and active lifestyles,” said Chelsea Coady, program co-ordinator at Fraser Basin Council.

The group of six came up with recipes for healthy baby food created from local and regional ingredients.

The event is geared toward young parents who don’t know where to begin when it comes to making baby food from scratch. The group will demonstrate four recipes for infants between the ages of three months and 18 months.

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West Fraser sells wharf

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West Fraser Timber announced Tuesday it has completed the sale of its deep sea wharf and related assets to Rio Tinto Alcan. The wharf formed part of West Fraser’s Eurocan linerboard and kraft paper mill in Kitimat.

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