

Outdoor Dinner Raises Funds for Nutrition Education

By TOM CASEY | August 05, 2012

KINDERHOOK — Tables were set neatly, as gourmet food provided and cooked by some of the county's finest restaurants were placed before hungry patrons. But the backdrop was not that of a bustling restaurant, but under a tent surrounded by a wide-spanning view of farmland with the sun setting in the distance.



This was the scene at the close of the annual Farm-to-Table Dinner at Katchkie Farms in Kinderhook Saturday, where 220 tickets had been sold. Patrons enjoyed food from the Crimson Sparrow, Cafe Le Perche, and DA/BA and were able to sample beer provided by Chatham Brewery. The dinner is held to benefit the Sylvania Center, a nonprofit organization that teaches children and teens about agriculture and preparing foods for a healthier diet.

"We all know about the obesity epidemic and we know we need to change the way we eat," said Liz Neumark, Katchkie Farm owner. "But when you tell a child what they can't have it makes them want it more; we want to show what great healthily grown food is and let the food speak for itself."

The program serves children from the Capital Region, New York City, and Columbia County. The event, in its fourth year, goes directly toward funding the program with county children. Neumark said this year marks a turning point for the organization to establish itself as a real member of the community in Columbia County.

"This is for the county children ... we feel really apart of the community," she said. "Now it's not just us getting to know them, but now they are getting to know us."

Anna Hammond, executive director of the Sylvania Center, said the center works hand in hand with the farm, and is on a "dual mission" to help improve nutrition.

"It's natural for us to support one another and work closely to help youths understand where food comes from and healthier eating habits, as well as teaching stewardship of the land," she said. "We had one girl come from Hudson who had never eaten a tomato before, and after trying it she said I want to eat this for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert."

Attendees were treated to a tour of the farm to see and taste some of the 150 vegetables and fruits grown at Katchkie farm. Educational Director and Garden Manager Julie Cerny, a Chatham native, said improving her diet motivated her to do the

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educational program and being able to work with the children in her own backyard was a dream job.

“There was a real difference — I began to really feel better and healthier,” she said. “That’s one of the reasons I wanted to do this line of work, to be able to share that with others.”

The children that visit get to tour the farm, then head out to the garden to see the vegetables, learning what each one is and how it can be eaten. The kids are then allowed to pick and create dinners using those vegetables.

Cerny said helping the kids who don’t have easy access to gardens in an urban setting can benefit from learning where their food comes from and how to prepare those meals.

“They are tasting, smelling and touching and are then able to make something with friends and sit down together to enjoy it,” said Cerny. “That is a really special thing.”

For information about the program and how to donate, visit sylviacenter.org.

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