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Experts show how to make healthy foods for kids

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Brandon Redlinger (right), 24, a preschool teacher and nutrition specialist at Turtle Creek Learning Academy in Marlboro, gets kindergartners students to show how they peel a banana. Students from left are: Rebecca Buonomo, Jiya Jaisinghani, and Lindsay Paris. At back is Virginia McDonald, executive director and curriculum specialist at the school. / STAFF PHOTO: MARY FRANK

Written by **SUSAN BLOOM** CORRESPONDENT

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Living Food

Travel past the red brick walls of the Turtle Creek Learning Academy in Marlboro and the scent of warm muffins fills the air, the end result of the efforts of a group of kindergartners eagerly mashing bananas, cracking eggs and stirring batter.

Future chefs in training? In fact, they are the young beneficiaries of the school's Healthy Start program, an innovative initiative designed to expose them to healthy foods and more nutritious choices when they are young.

Combining more than 25 years of experience in teaching with skills attained at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, Turtle Creek

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Executive Director and Curriculum Specialist Virginia McDonald has made a vocation out of finding fun and creative ways to teach kids and their parents the basics of better nutrition.

"The fact is, society is a lot more fractured today than it was in the past — often both parents work, the kids are highly scheduled, and there just isn't an emphasis on or the time for balanced, sit-down meals together at the table anymore," McDonald said. "And many parents aren't educated about healthy food choices themselves.

"Back in the 1970s, experts predicted that if we continued to be a nation of fast and processed-food eaters, we'd see the fallout — and we are," she said. "Children are eating too much sugar and not enough healing fruits and vegetables containing natural enzymes."

McDonald said getting kids to make healthier choices is not as hard as it seems.

"Children are often very open to new things and really enjoy participating in the food preparation process," she said. "At our school, we make green smoothies with kale, spinach, blueberries and bananas and the kids love them. Exposing kids again and again to these foods and getting them involved in the kitchen in a fun way is the key."

Turtle Creek Nutrition Specialist Brandon Redlinger agreed and stressed importance of parents being part of the process.


"Parents really need to be role models when it comes to healthy foods," he said. "Kids are far more likely to make good food choices if their parents practice these behaviors themselves."

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