

Child Care Centers provide natural diet for children

BY BETH LAWTON

You'll never find twinkies in the lunchboxes of children going to University Child Care Center, 333 N. 14th St., or the Infant Care Center at 6345 Madison Ave. Both centers adhere to a natural food policy. And, according to Valdeen Nelsen, director of the project, parental reactions have been positive.

"It's a drawing card for enrollment," Nelsen said.

When the child care center first opened in 1970, sack lunches were brought by the parents for their children, she said. Then, in 1973, a decision was made to furnish meals for the children at an increased fee. At the time of the switch to hot meals, the natural food plan was implemented.

The University Infant Care Center opened its doors in 1971. It is currently located on Madison Ave., but will move to the basement of Wesley House, 640 N. 16th St., before the fall semester begins. It also endorses a natural food policy.

"Parents' reactions are real favorable," said Melinda Brown, supervisor for the infant care.

Menus for the centers are decided upon by a committee that includes personnel from both centers, a vista volunteer and interested parents.

The menus are arranged in cycles for spring, summer, fall and winter, said Joyce Wagner, supervisor for child care. These cycles are revised once a year, she said, with both centers using the same cycle and the same food.

Recipes for the menus come from various cookbooks

that the centers have or recipes that parents may suggest.

Cost of the natural food in relation to other food depends on the item, Wagner said. Some foods are more expensive, such as organic raisins, she said.

Longer preparation and cooking is needed for some of the foods. Both centers try to use fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables during the summer, Brown said, adding that they often used canned diet fruit to avoid sugar.

Vegetarian meals are served three times per week and these are often cheaper than meat meals, Stephens said.

Some specific substitutions include wheat, rye or soy flour for white flour; cornbread or whole wheat for white bread; honey for sugar; sauces for syrup, carob for chocolate; and C-salt for regular salt. Very little of the salt is used and omitted if possible. There are no preservatives used and the infant center avoids nuts.

Effect on the children's behavior is hard to tell, Wagner said. Brown said that the only side-effect for the smaller children is diarrhea from the whole wheat.

The children themselves usually have little trouble adjusting to the natural foods, Wagner said, adding that they can usually accept it better than the workstudy staff.

Brown said that most of the smaller children eat well and won't say anything until they are asked to try a certain food.

The children do let them know what their favorites are, though. "They love barbecued chicken legs," Brown said.

Pizza is also a big hit with the children, along with fruits and vegetables, she said. Pineapple is a fruit that it quickly eaten, but one they dislike is grapefruit because of its bitterness, she said.

Blended meats for the babies doesn't go over very well, Brown said, adding that they really like vegetables.

A few of the foods that the older kids will avoid eating are eggplant quiche, squash parmesan, and yogurt with granola, Brown said.

Most parents think that the policy is a good one and will follow the programs somewhat at home. Most families cut down on sugar and salt, but don't make sure to get whole wheat bread every week, Brown said. Yet, there are a few families who do incorporate natural foods into their homes.

The project's on a reimbursement plan with the USDA and receives 65 percent to 70 percent of their total monthly costs for food and labor connected with food preparation, Nelsen said.

Because of this plan, there are specific requirements that must be adhered to when a menu is planned, she said. Food components are set up by the USDA for each meal served and specific minimum amounts are given. For breakfasts, each child must have milk, juice or fruit,

cereal and-or bread. Lunch must include milk, meat and-or an alternate such as poultry, fish, cheese, eggs, peanut butter or cooked dry beans or peas, a vegetable or fruit and bread, enriched or whole grain. The amounts for each center varies.

In addition, the infant care also has requirements for mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack. This includes milk, juice, fruit or vegetable, and bread or cereal.

"It makes me feel good to fix a whole meal," said Libby Stephens, nutritionist for the University Child Care Center.

But some on the staff seem a little less enthusiastic about it.

"If the kids and staff get hungry enough, they'll get used to it," said Ronnie Buss, a workstudy student.

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Letters to the editor

I received in the mail yesterday a copy of the article, (Summer Nebraskan, June 18), Lori Merryman wrote following my presentation at the Brown Bag Luncheon Series in the UNL student union. I appreciated the coverage, but had hoped for a more accurate rendering of the views I expressed:

— The article I cited in which it was stated that "no human rights problems exist in Guatemala" was not attributed to Sec. Haig, but his special emissary, Gen. Vernon L. Walters, in the Washington Post, reported by Chris Dickey.

— I specifically stated, at considerable length, that Cuba has been disparaged as a revolutionary role model in Latin America and that it is highly unlikely revolutionary governments will follow its mistakes, i.e., mass nationalizations of resources, abolition of dissident parties, militancy toward the U.S. I cited Nicaragua as an example of this trend, where 60 percent of the country's resources are still in private sector control, opposition parties continue to challenge official Sandinista policies, and the Nicaraguans have invited all countries, including the U.S., to help them in their reconstruction and economic revitalization efforts. And, for God sakes, the Sandinistas are not a "family," but the vanguard party of the revolution that overthrew the Somoza family which had dominated the country for 43 years.

— I stated that churches have accepted, in certain aspects, that Marxist thought can be compatible with Christian dogma, though the Superior General of the Jesuit Order in Rome recently issued a lengthy statement warning churchmen not to go so far as to adopt Marxism as a valid political system which accords with their religious beliefs in its entirety. In the same letter, he instructed that the door should be left open for discussion between the church and Marxist analysis of societal injustices in Latin America.

J. Michael Luhan

Letters policy

The Summer Nebraskan welcomes readers comments and opinions — either in the form of Letters to the Editor, or, on longer pieces, as Guest Opinions. The editor reserves the right to condense letters, while maintaining the writer's original point. Timeliness, clarity and relevance are all determining factors for publication.

All submissions must be received the Monday prior to date of publication. All letters must be signed and verifiable.