

1st Graders Fight Against Hunger

Experience food from the farm to your table

By Heather Zimar

More than 60 South Hill Elementary School first-graders received a surprise invitation this month to attend Ithaca's 25th Taste of the Nation, a gala fundraiser that has raised more than \$750,000 for local hunger and poverty relief services.

An Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) Community Collaboration Grant titled "Farm-to-Table: Healthy Food for All People" brought Jerry Dietz, chairman of Share Our Strength's local Taste of the Nation event, to South Hill this month to discuss his volunteer work in the community. At the end of his talk, Dietz invited the three first-grade classes to join "Team No Kid Hungry" and to attend the June 17 event at Ithaca College. Their role is to help raise money for the cause by selling their handmade trivets, bean soup kits and recipe collections.

"Since Share Our Strength's focus is on ending childhood hunger, having the first-graders attend Taste of the Nation and share what they have learned throughout this grant program plays out in a number of positive ways," Dietz said. "It is reinforcement and reward to the children for a job well done, it gives the adult attendees of Taste of the Nation the opportunity to see the impact this can have on young children and, frankly, it underscores for everyone that this is just a good thing to do."

IPEI Community Collaboration Grants are awarded to not-for-profit organizations that partner with Ithaca City School District (ICSD) teachers to develop and implement curricular-enhancing pro-



Photo provided

Jerry Dietz talks with a group of First Graders at South Hill Elementary

grams. The "Farm-to-Table" grant, designed by first-grade teachers Nancy Marino, Kathleen White and Patti Caughey, is a yearlong, interdisciplinary approach to teaching students about farming and healthy food. The multi-layered curriculum involves every subject: reading, writing, social studies, math, science and physical education.

Dietz visit was timed after a social justice unit in which students studied Cesar Chavez's nonviolent fight for fair treatment of migrant farm workers. "We introduced the students to the character trait 'passion,'" said Marino. "After we studied the nationally-known Cesar Chavez, we wanted to bring in someone from our own community who is passionate about something

important."

"Nancy has always been interested in the work I have done with Share Our Strength helping to mitigate hunger in our community," Dietz said. "I have always liked Share Our Strength's philosophy that, 'Everyone has a strength to share in the fight against hunger,' and when she contacted me last summer to tell me she had this idea to run a yearlong, integrated project on food, it really resonated with me."

In his presentation, Dietz shared his childhood love of bike-riding and fishing, and how these passions have impacted his life. "When I was your age, I would ride my bike by the stream every day of the summer and fish," he told the first-graders. "I'd get bread from a little grocery store on

the way to bait my hook. I used my bike to do so many other things, too, like ride to a field to play baseball or go to friends' houses. I've been passionate about bike-riding since I learned to ride without training wheels."

Dietz explained that when he was growing up in the 1960s, processed foods were the norm. "I didn't have a lot of exposure to fresh food," he said. "It was often out of a can. I had a very different diet and way of eating."

After moving to Ithaca in the early 1970s, Dietz became more interested in food and hunger after opening two local restaurants. "In owning restaurants, I learned a lot about food," he told the stu-

continued on page 34

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