

From farm to table

The Path encourages residents to go with fresh produce

By Nancy Kennedy

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BEVERLY HILLS — As Fernando Williams manned the grill, flipping the very vegetables he helped grow out at The Path farm, he revealed his secret to his prize-winning recipe: balsamic vinegar and olive oil marinade.



Stephen E. Lasko

Fernando Williams prepares a meal of grilled onion, zucchini, yellow squash, egg plant, patty pan squash and red okra that are home grown on 10 acres by the members of The Path of Citrus County Rescue.
<http://www.spiphotos.smugmug.com/>

Williams and the other men in Path house 25 won The Path's fourth annual cook-off competition Monday with their grilled vegetables — patty pan squash, eggplant, zucchini, yellow squash, red okra and red onions — and Chicken Hawaiian.

The cook-off pits each of the four Path shelter houses against each other for a friendly competition, using recipes of their own creation that incorporate at least two vegetables from among the 40-plus varieties grown at the farm in Hernando.

"It's a fun way to get clients engaged with the vegetables," said Path office manager Kristy Lindke. "What we found, they work at the farm, planting and weeding and feeding the vegetables, but they're not eating them. They're used to eating a lot of carbs and a really poor diet."

Because a poor diet affects not only a person's physical health, but mental and emotional health as well, DuWayne Sipper, The Path executive director, was eager to find ways of getting the shelter residents to eat more healthy food, not just while they were there, but once they have left the program.

He brought in nutrition classes and food demonstrations. As the clients began learning about food and working out at the farm, they started connecting the two and asked Sipper if they could have a cook-off.

That was four years ago, and it has become one of the highlights of the year.

"It's a healthy competition; it's great team-building and the creativity and artistry is amazing," said Kathryn Sipper, Path development director. "People really surprise you."

At Path house 27, just minutes before the cook-off began Monday, Juan Fuentes put the finishing touches on the team's "The Path Garden of Eden Eggplant Lasagna" entry. Broccoli florets were made to look like trees and shrubs with a line of carrot slices running through them.

"The carrots are the 'path,'" Fuentes said.

The men made the marinara sauce themselves, seasoned with thyme and oregano.

House 27 made a "salvation stew" with vegetables and beans and also created a raw vegetable and fruit platter made to look like Noah's Ark, complete with a sail made from pear slices.

"My mom was big on me knowing how to cook, and I've worked in a few restaurants," said John Hoffman.

DuWayne Sipper said he has seen huge changes in the clients as they enter the program, work at the farm and change their diets.

He said many come in overweight but malnourished. Those who are detoxing from drug or alcohol addiction find peace and quiet working in the dirt and gain self-esteem from watching the food they plant and nurture go from farm to the dinner table.

"We're getting back to our roots," Sipper said. "We're teaching people to eat raw, fresh food and they're discovering that they like it.

"What we hope is that they enjoy the competition of the cook-off, but even more, we hope that when they leave here they'll remember what they've learned," he said. "They might not go out and grow their own food, but when they go to the grocery store, they'll know what to buy."

Contact Chronicle reporter Nancy Kennedy at 352-564-2927 or nkennedy@chronicleonline.com.