

Kids get tasty lessons in culinary magic

Nutritionist's focus is grains, veggies

By Susan Gembrowski
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CREST — Think typical kid diet and it's hot dogs, spaghetti and chocolate pudding.

But artichokes, squash and broccoli? Doubt it.

Will kids even eat that stuff? Antonia Demas, a New York-

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Antonia Demas, a New York-based nutritionist and director of the Food Studies Institute

based nutritionist, knows they will.

During a recent cooking lesson at Crest Elementary School, Demas showed the first-graders how to make a barley dish with leeks, dill, artichokes and peas.

The youngsters loved it.

"My research proved that kids do eat foods that are extremely healthy that adults



Kylee Albright (left) held a pan as classmate James McIntire scraped cut leeks into it. *Nances E. Lewis / Union-Tribune*

cultural lessons from around the world. The recipes emphasize vegetables and grains.

Demas was invited to the school by parent Barbara Gates, who raised \$1,500 for the program. Gates and two other mothers will demonstrate

corn, butternut squash, dill and maple syrup.

For Martin Luther King Day, there will be "soul stew," made from black-eyed peas and greens. Soy burgers will be the fare for Presidents Day, and frioles and tortillas will take on

would be teaching," Geller said.

Demas emphasized that point at a recent demonstration when she told the students stories comparing the Egyptian pyramids to the food pyramid.

In preparing the food, she

About an hour after the lesson began, paper plates appeared at every child's desk. They were told they would eat with their hands — after the food cooled, of course — as in many Middle Eastern and African

extremely healthy that adults would swear they wouldn't eat," said Demas, director of the Food Studies Institute, a consulting firm.

And healthy eating has to be a top priority, Demas said, particularly with recent statistics that show 14 percent of children in the United States are overweight.

She has traveled the country promoting her "Food Is Elementary" curriculum, which integrates food preparation with

the program. Gates and two other mothers will demonstrate five of Demas' 28 lessons to first- and third-graders during the school year.

But it's the kids who will do the cooking.

Students will learn about the origins of Halloween and the foods used to celebrate long-ago harvests, such as squash, pumpkins, apples and nuts. At Thanksgiving, coupled with a lesson on American Indians, they'll make a "three sisters casserole" of kidney beans,

corn and turkey. Lessons are also planned for President's Day, and in joles and tortillas will take center stage on Cinco de Mayo.

Not only are youngsters learning about food, but the cooking lessons incorporate math, social studies, art, writing and reading as the kids study recipes, jot down reactions to the lessons, draw pictures of food and answer questions about different cultures, said Crest Principal Sue Geller.

"The (cooking) lessons are actually another way for us to teach the lessons we normally

In preparing the food, she showed students how to cut leeks — only allowed with a parent volunteer helping them — add artichokes, peas and dill, and pour olive oil into a pan centered on a hot plate.

As Demas talked, youngsters got into the spirit. Matthew Reynolds, 6, walked around the class and let other youngsters smell the dill.

This boy was into cooking, talking about the fish he and his father caught and prepared the night before.

many Middle Eastern and African cultures.

"Close your eyes and then taste the food," Demas said.

The students responded with a collective "Mmmm."

The program "gets kids to accept a healthy diet at an early age," Demas said. "When you go through the creative process of cooking it, they'll go home and eat it."

First-grader Jack Gates agreed. "It was fun. I got to make the pyramid and stir the food."