Kids get tasty lessons in culinary magic

Nutritionist's focus is grains, veggies

By Susan Gembrowski
STAFF WRITER

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-based nutritionist, knows they will.

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

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 would swear they wouldn't eat,” Demas said.

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

Damas 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 frigoles and tortillas will take center stage.

“I 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 shared what she knew.

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 cultures.
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.

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