

Blaine High School opens food shelf for students

Thursday, February 17th, 2011



With a sharp increase in the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch, staff at Blaine High School began to worry about how students were eating on weekends and school breaks. Jerri McGonigal, an assistant principal, said a decision was made to start "Tiger Take Out," a food shelf for students.

"This was something several staff members felt passionate about," said McGonigal. "Blaine High School, like a lot of high schools in the district, is very committed to community service and we do a lot of things outside of school for the community. This is something we can do very well for our

Blaine High School community."

The idea for the food shelf began with the English and social studies departments and Cassidy Pohl, a student learning advocate, brought it to the administration in early November. Tiger Take Out organizers spent November and December preparing the food shelf area and collecting donations. The program was up and running when students returned from break in January.

"First, we asked the student council for start-up money," McGonigal said. "That was used to purchase materials to have large storage units made. The labor to build the units was donated by teachers.

"The Blaine High School Business Professionals of America (BPA) donated 30 new backpacks we can use to pack the food for students, staff contributed money and Gold's Gym in Blaine did a food drive. Groups within the school, like the boys' basketball team, have also held food drives and other groups are seeking out opportunities."

McGonigal said Medica is offering a \$25 gift certificate to Cub Foods for clients who complete a short health survey. Staff members taking the survey are being encouraged to donate their gift cards to Tiger Take Out.

Tiger Take Out organizers created an appeals letter for staff to share with community organizations. The goal is for a community organization to volunteer to stock the food shelf one month a year. In addition to food items, Tiger Take Out is seeking donations of personal hygiene items and cold-weather clothing, such as coats, hats and mittens.

To establish Tiger Take Out, McGonigal and Pohl went to Cub Foods in Blaine and ordered \$600 of teen-age friendly food.

"We wanted to make sure the mixes only needed water and other meals that are easy to make," McGonigal said. "We also realize that sometimes they aren't just feeding themselves, the students are looking after brothers and sisters, too. We want students to know if they need a special item, like baby formula, we can get it to them. Cub Foods helped us get the most bang for our buck, and we've already been back to resupply some items."

To get the word out about Tiger Take Out, McGonigal said a video was created, posters have been hung and information about the effort has been in the daily announcements. Students are instructed to contact a school counselor if they are interested in Tiger Take Out services. Parent volunteers pack backpacks full of food which the students are given on a Friday. They are asked to return the empty backpacks on Monday.

Through Tiger Take Out, McGonigal said she hopes students learn that their high school community supports each other through good times and bad.

"There is need in our community - it exists," she said. "There are day-to-day things many of us take for granted. For example, Tiger Take Out has canned goods, but one student didn't have a can opener. We now have can openers.

"We have a wonderful community at Blaine High School and we do a good job of taking care of each other."

Anyone interested in donating to Tiger Take Out can drop off food, personal care items or grocery store gift cards at the high school office. Grocery store gift cards can also be purchased from the Anoka-Hennepin Educational Foundation (AHEF) at the Educational Service Center. AHEF staff can send the donated cards directly to Tiger Take Out.

Tiger Take Out was recently featured on North Metro News cable station and KSTP. [Click here](#) to view the North Metro News video feature. [Click here](#) to view the KSTP video feature.