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Food Service Workers Served A Big Slice of Thank You

Students and staff across the state served up a big slice of "Thank You" to food service staff on Utrust's Food Service Appreciation Day, Thursday, January 15th.

Utrust developed packets of ideas for principals but each school had its own way of saying thanks. Some students sent thank you notes, others made gift baskets. Thank you messages were put on marquees and announcements made over the P.A. System.

Several schools gave lunch workers a break from cooking by giving them gift certificates to local restaurants. Some faculty members switched roles with their cafeteria workers by serving them lunch.

At one east Tennessee school, cafeteria workers each received a gift certificate for a pedicure, to provide a little relief for those employees who spend all day on their feet.

School boards also showed support by adopting Food Service Day resolutions, and giving employees certificates of appreciation.

From superintendents to students, helpings of "Thanks" were dished up, making the day a special treat for those who make a difference in the cafeteria.



A board full of thank you notes posted at Church Hill Middle School in Hawkins County.

"It was exactly the response that we were hoping for," said Utrust Administrator Dan Tollett. "We were excited to see school boards, superintendents and principals use the packets Utrust provided to make a special day for food service staff members who traditionally have received far too little recognition for the contributions they have made to the success of our schools."

Neither Rain, Nor Sleet, Nor Cold...

Food Service Appreciation Day fell under some bad weather for one or two weeks, depending on which part of Tennessee the snow, ice, cold or floodwaters descended. But that didn't stop the valiant efforts of dozens of school systems that shifted days, changed ideas and did their best to say thank you to their lunch ladies as part of Utrust's Make A Difference Employee Appreciation Day.

"We found a way to show our love," said Linda Cheek, principal at Etowah City School, "even though it took two weeks for all our children to get their chance to show their appreciation." Etowah City was closed for extreme cold, snow days and for MLK Day. "We even had a flood this month," she said. But a silk flower arrangement, banners, cards and "hugs and kisses" thawed the bad weather for lunch ladies there.



Carter County shut down schools from the 19th through the 23rd. But efforts to say "thank you" weren't halted. Range School gave each cafeteria employee a \$20 gift card to the Coffee Cup coffee shop. Other schools in the system put together thank you cards, marquee notices, cookies and flower arrangements. "Snow days put a kink in some of our plans, but we came thorough," said Marisa Potter, Food Services Director.

“You’re the Bomb”

Hawkins County Schools didn't pull any stops when thanking members of its food service staff. Students and staff made desserts, gave goodie baskets and gift certificates, and wrote lots of thank you notes.

A couple of students surprised the lunchroom staff when they opened their jackets in a flashing manner, only to reveal thank you notes pinned inside that read “You’re the bomb!” Tackett said she and other staff got a kick out of it. “It made us appreciate them more, for taking time to understand what it is we do.” “The Utrust Food Service Appreciation Day provided Hawkins County Schools an opportunity to recognize an often overlooked and underappreciated group of hard-working employees who are essential to our system's mission to “Educate and Graduate” each student” said Nedra Jackson, Director of Personnel for Hawkins County Schools.



Food service staff treated to lunch at Church Hill Middle School in Hawkins County

At Church Hill Middle School, lunchroom staff were served lunch at a table decorated by students and faculty. “It made us feel special, students came up and thanked us during lunch, it was so sweet” said food service employee Dreama Skeen.

The Hawkins County School Board and central office also thanked food service employees. A scrolling message of thanks was posted on the school system's website, and each employee received a personalized certificate and ebony travel mug.

The Rogersville City Board of Education awarded its employees with certificates and adopted a resolution declaring January 15, 2009, as Food Service Personnel Appreciation Day.



Students flashing notes of thanks to cafeteria workers at Surgoinsville Middle School in Hawkins County.

Cool Desserts Warm Hearts in Crockett County

Crockett County High School celebrated Food Service Appreciation Day in a cool way...or even a frozen way. But the ice cream social sponsored by the school's Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) still warmed the hearts of nine lunch ladies who were “tickled and touched” by the efforts made on their behalf.

FCCLA was joined by the FFA and Principal Steve Ramsey in putting together a memorable day for the ladies who rise before dawn to put lunch on the tables in the school's Cavalier Café. The FFA put together goodies of beef jerky tied with a bow that sported hand-crafted thank you cards.

Principal Ramsey started the day off by presenting each cafeteria worker with a thank you letter and certificate of appreciation. Ramsey and his students pitched in to honor the lunch ladies as part of Utrust's Make A Difference Employee Appreciation Day January 15.

Ramsey's personal attention “started the day off

right,” said Darlene Woodruff, cafeteria manager with 11 years' service. Later that morning, the FCCLA brought in a fruit basket “which we're still eating a week later,” said Suzie Vestal, who has 10 years' service at Crockett County High. Next came snack bags of popcorn, gum and crackers.

An enthusiastic 63 FCCLA students took Utrust's suggestions of banners and thank you notes many steps further, explained Danielle Hazlewood and Misty Garrett, FCCLA sponsors. “They had a great time and enjoyed expanding the project in so many ways because they knew they made the day for our food service ladies,” Hazlewood added. And at the end of the lunch ladies' long day, the tables were indeed turned when they were ushered into the FCCLA classroom for an afternoon treat of ice cream floats and sundaes. “We were surprised all day long,” said Woodruff, who added that “even talking about the day makes her want to cry.”

“It felt good to be appreciated,” she said.



Crockett County's FCCLA super-sized Utrust's suggestions for a thank you card January 15.

“I couldn't have been happier with all the attention lavished on us by the FCCLA, Principal Steve Ramsey and the FFA on Food Service Appreciation Day.”

Darlene Woodruff, Cafeteria Manager

Wilson County Gives Golden Spoon Award

Wilson County schools used some imagination when thanking its Food Service Personnel.

Gladeville Elementary kindergarten students sang songs to cafeteria workers, and even created "Golden Spoon" awards for lunchroom employees.

West Elementary staff used only the best, getting out the fine china and crystal to set the table, and serving a meal for lunchroom workers. A pep rally was also held to give a big thanks to those who make the meals every day.

Each school came up with its own special way to say thank you. "We had individual classes make cards and posters and we put a big thank you on our marquee out front along with daily announcements saying how much we appreciate our cafeteria folks!" said Carroll-Oakland Principal Carol Ferrell.



The events made this *Appreciation Day* a golden spoon moment for all of Wilson County Schools.

Grainger County Food For Thought

Because Sheila Morgan works tirelessly to feed hungry children in Grainger County, Utrust has recognized her as a Difference Maker in the Utrust Make A Difference© Employee Appreciation Program. On school days, Sheila Morgan and her co-workers at Rutledge Elementary serve food for thought. That's because their breakfasts and lunches fuel learning.

But on Fridays, holidays and through the summer, Morgan sends children home with food-filled backpacks that feed their souls. Because, due to her efforts with Second Harvest – and help whenever it's needed from the other cafeteria ladies -- Morgan makes certain that the children of Grainger County have hope. "We make sure they don't go to bed hungry."

Morgan, cafeteria manager at Rutledge Elementary with eight years' service, says her efforts make a difference "one meal at a time. We make a difference through small things that add up. When we send food home, we give hope."

Morgan and her co-workers pack 70 weekend meals during the school year. In four other schools in the system, cafeteria workers pack another 95 backpacks to assure that 165 children in Grainger County don't go hungry over weekends and holidays.

Retired Principal Stanley Roach and Morgan dreamed up the backpack plan four years ago. Since then, the program, among five participating schools – Bean Station, Rutledge Elementary, Rutledge Primary, Rutledge Middle and Joppa -- has quadrupled. Just this year, Rutledge Elementary's numbers have doubled, said Principal Tim Collins.

Collins believes the program works because Rutledge "has a lot of teamwork. They do this because they care and want to make a difference in the lives of the children here," he added.

And Morgan hasn't stopped with food. She sees other needs and finds ways to fill them. This year, she and the cafeteria and teachers at Rutledge pitched in to provide Christmas gifts for children. She plans to expand her program to include clothing donations, too. "Sometimes we see kids wearing the same outfit days at a time; we can help with that," she said.

"I get a blessing out of this," Morgan said.

And THAT is food for thought.



Rutledge Elementary: Geneva Antrican, Phyllis Satterfield, Stacy Whitworth, Sheila Morgan and Tracy Williams.



"Gerti Grape" (Food Service Secretary-Celia Smith) and Gainesboro Elementary School Principal, Charles Breidert

"Have A Grape Day" in Jackson County

The almost famous Gerti Grape has been spotted in schools throughout Jackson County. Ms. Grape's purpose for visiting schools is to advertise a new School Nutrition Program. The program, Be Bright, Eat Right, is designed to focus on the need for proper nutrition in improving academic test scores and decreasing absenteeism. Gerti's message is simple. She says, "The food you eat directly affects the performance of your brain. It has been proven that by eating the right food, you can boost your IQ, improve your mood, be more emotionally stable, sharpen your memory and keep your mind young.

If you give your brain the right nutrients, you will be able to think quicker, have a better memory, be better coordinated and balanced, and have improved concentration.

Doing this is easy. The three key brain foods to boost your brainpower and keep your brain healthy and your mental processes operating effectively are nutritious food, water and oxygen." According to Brenda Hawkins, Supervisor of the Jackson County School Nutrition Program, "Our employees want to make sure that students know that they need to feed their brains if they are going to maintain proper brain function throughout their lives." "The next time you think school food, think brain food. And as Gerti says, have a grape day."

"Our schools have many employees like Celia Smith who go over and above what is required of them to make a difference in the lives of students," said Utrust Administrator Dan Tollett. "We enjoy finding them and sharing their stories."



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Utrust's Employee Development and Appreciation Program is designed to help our member school boards create a climate where employees thrive, produce high quality work, enjoy their work, feel appreciated and want to remain.

Ultimately, such a climate works to reduce unemployment claims but even more importantly, improves the learning environment for children in our schools. Employees who are recognized and appreciated will be more effective.

---David Jones, Chairman