

JUNK FOOD NOT THE ISSUE

By DON SIKORSKI
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Running isn't a controversial sport. You won't hear stories of men sitting around in a local tavern bickering over who was the better marathoner. So when contemplating subject matter for the next running column, I realized that voicing a written opinion on the recent debate of healthy snacks in public schools might change things. Because clearly there are plenty of people out there who are passionate advocates of banishing soda, candy bars, chips, and any other unhealthy nourishments craved by today's student from our public school systems. The schools were quick to counter this argument. Healthy snacks cost more and sell less, they say. That makes for poor morale and an even poorer bottom line financially, a problem most schools are already struggling with. What side of this debate do you stand on? For the record, I'm all for letting the schools decide and offering choices, both healthy and the not-so-healthy, and leaving the ultimate decision of what goes into their bodies up to the students. The truth is, we can hide the chips and the sodas all day long, but if they want it bad enough, kids will find it somewhere else. Consider this logic: as an adult, I can have a cheeseburger and beer for breakfast, sit real close to the television, and run all around the house with scissors in my hand if I so choose. Fortunately, I was taught long ago that these are all poor behavioral choices. But it's not my concern if someone else wants to indulge in this lifestyle. After all, America is about the freedom to choose, so the ultimate responsibility should fall on the individual.

As a Finance guy, I also understand that schools need to make budget. So-called "junk" foods are less expensive to purchase than healthy foods are. To schools, that means lower cost of goods sold. Offering snacks that kids will buy is also important; that translates into greater sales. Somehow I can't picture kids lining up at the vending machines for celery sticks. So greater sales and lower costs translates to a better bottom line financially. What taxpayer doesn't want this to happen?

Considering another angle in the debate. Instead of blaming poor dietary choices for the sad physical condition of today's youth, we should evaluate the benefits of exercise and figure out why it is pretty much non-existent for a large percentage of today's population. When we were kids, the thought of a diet that avoided carbohydrates at all costs but allowed sausage and bacon to be consumed by the truckload would have been ridiculed. And yet, according to national statistics, we were much fitter in those days than today's child. Instead of targeting fast food chain restaurants as the bad guy, we should look at our lifestyles. Kids back then didn't rely strictly on organized sports leagues for athletic endeavors; we could organize a good whiffle ball game or run 4-on-4 hoops on the playground all on our own. And although we may not have realized it back then, but those activities burned calories, and plenty of them. So much in fact that a post-game soda was a treat and certainly not something to feel guilty about. Modern conveniences have also allowed us a more sedentary lifestyle. Consider the activities we seldom do anymore, like opening a garage door or getting off the couch to change the channel on the television. When we do indulge in fast food, we don't even have to get out of our cars. Drive-thru windows are great; I'd personally be lost trying to find where to purchase a burger and fries from an establishment without one. Finally, the internet has forever changed society. Too many hours in front of the computer is bad for the eyes and bad for the waistline. To counter these effects, we need to make a conscious effort to exercise on a regular basis. If running isn't your thing, go for a brisk walk, take a bike ride with your kids, or choose the stairs instead of the elevator. Anything makes a difference, and your body will thank you for it later in life. We should let the kids have their snacks, and then begin to promote physical activity as the means to healthier children.

Racing Calendar

Don't worry if you couldn't find the Reliance House 5K Road Race on any race calendars this past May or June. The race will take place, but with a brand new date and location. Because of construction issues affecting downtown Norwich, the Reliance House 5K, which for the last 19 years had started in front of the Norwich YMCA and finished at Billy Wilson's Ageing Still on Franklin Street, will now take place on Saturday, October 15th in the center of Norwich's Mohegan Park. The race will begin at 11:00am and feature a new course that may even incorporate a portion of cross-country racing, according to new Race Coordinator Kerry Bilda. This year's event will be conducted in honor of the late Joe Lonardelli, an honorary member of the Mohegan Striders Association who donated many hours of his time assisting with youth athletic events in Norwich. Look for applications to hit the streets this month, or contact the Reliance House at 887-6536 for more information.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@netzero.net.