

Plenty of “Food for Thought” for budding young chefs

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DARTMOUTH — The Dartmouth Grange by Alderbrook Farm is only a 15-minute drive from New Bedford, but the bucolic setting gives it the atmosphere of a place far removed from the urban landscape.



The sprawling farm has goats, cows, donkeys, and a brook running through the middle of the property. It's a taste of Vermont on SouthCoast.

For a total of eight weeks, a busload of teenage girls from the Our Sisters' School in New Bedford are coming to Alderbrook to learn how to cook healthy and delicious meals for themselves and their families.

The program, “Food for Thought,” is an offshoot of the Trips for Kids program founded by Executive Director Joanne Tschaen.

“We take them out of the city and into the woods, and out to the farms. They get to learn about environmental stewardship,” said Tschaen. Another benefit of the program is that the kids discover what goes into keeping a working farm going at Alderbrook, in addition to seeing some farm animals up close.

One of their lessons was a foray into maple syruping.

Trips for Kids began as a six-week summer program nine years ago and Tschaen said “because the kids have responded so well, we have almost year-round programs “» I never envisioned that we would evolve from bike rides to cooking.”

Food for Thought isn't just about teaching kids the basics of cooking. They learn about nutrition, and where their food comes from. To make omelets, they go across the street to the chicken coop at Alderbrook Farm and collect eggs straight from under the chickens. Tschaen said the program came about



because the students expressed a desire to learn to cook.

“The kids developed their own curriculum. They said ‘We want to learn how to cook when we’re home alone, or taking care of younger kids ‘» Local kids came to adults and said ‘This is what we want, and this is what we need’.”

Program Director Gina Bourassa is also a teacher’s aide at Trinity Day Academy in New Bedford and

acknowledged “that it’s tough for kids these days “» they need more programs.,” She said she wishes there had been more programs like this around when she was a child.

The Grange kitchen is certified by the state to be used for the production and packaging of food to be sold. A number of local culinary entrepreneurs take advantage of the kitchen, and then sell their wares at Alderbrook’s farm stand. The stand has an eclectic mix of locally made products from Irish soda bread to Bloody Mary mix.

Local resident Jennifer Joclin was the guest speaker at Food for Thought’s first class. What began as a way to sneak vegetables into her kids’ food has grown into a small business, with three varieties of sauces at 30 stores, including Whole Foods, she said.



“It was originally a way of getting my kids to eat more vegetables “» there’s no ... pieces so they can’t identify the vegetables,” Joclin said. “It’s an easy, convenient way to make pasta and pizza dishes healthy.”

Although the class usually cooks a meal from scratch, at this particular session, they made spaghetti, and Joclin talked to them about how she got her business started. Every student went home with a jar of her sauce, and a coupon for a free spaghetti product.

Eighth-grader Caroline Gathers, for one, is impressed by what she is hearing and learning.

“My mom can’t cook and she doesn’t like to,” Caroline said. “I can actually cook dinner now. And I can expand my horizons.”