

PRINT THIS · CLOSE WINDOW

11/26/11 | 1 comment | 389 views



## Healthy - but inexpensive - meals are in the bag

New effort targets low-income families

By Anne Stokes Press Tribune Correspondent



Anne Stokes/The Press Tribune

Lisa Metheny, COO of Westlake, Grahl, and Glover, works with firm partner Colin Grahl to assemble "GrandHotCereal" breakfast meals for the "BagsOfLife" nutrition project.



Gopal Kapur was frustrated with what he saw on TV.

The Roseville Rotarian, Family Green Survival president and long-time cook by hobby was infuriated by lawmakers' publicized attempts to live on limited food budgets in the same manner as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients, purchasing overly-processed and nutrition-poor foods.

"I was trying to slap the TV at that time! That is not what you go buy. You go buy beans, you go buy eggs, you go buy things that are cheap and have high nutrition," he said. "And so that's how it started. This experimentation, putting together a solution — that's how it all came about, just trying to serve."

His solution was to create the nutritious and easy to cook "BagOfLife" meals.

With the help of the Rotary Club of Roseville and pro bono advice from the Sutter Health nutrition department, Kapur developed several recipes: "GrandHotCereal," "SoupOf Life," "NuttyQuinoaPilaf," and "LeanMeanBeanProtein."

These pre-packaged foods include four meals for a family of four that require little more than water and heat to prepare, but they also meet the FDA daily recommended allowance

for protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates, minus excessive sodium and saturated fats.

And at an average price of 75 cents per serving, they're cheap.

"Our quest is that within a week of eating, we replace many of the meals people eat from high-calorie, low-nutrition into very high-nutrition meals," Kapur said. "We are also hoping that as a result of this, they'll discriminate what they eat a little more. So if they eat lentils and they like it, then we hope that they'll buy lentils and cook them themselves."

Taste was another important component to take into consideration.

"We said we should test with children," Kapur said. "If the children won't eat it, the (parents) won't cook it, and this stuff will be thrown away in the garbage."

Taste tests were conducted at the North Roseville REC Center and the Roseville Home Start facility.

"And the only thing we told people was 'you are free to spit it out. But if you spit it out tell us what you didn't like,'" he said. "And to my surprise, and to the parents' delight, kids came back for seconds and thirds."

This year, his goal was to create 50 "BagOfLife" meals to distribute to local families through the Home Start and REC Center programs.

Employees from the firm of Westlake, Grahl, and Glover in Granite Bay donated their office space and time to help package the meals on Saturday, Nov. 19.

The effort was coordinated by Megan Boespflug, manager and fellow member of the Rotary Club of Roseville.

"It's a great program," she said. "We're glad that we can support it as a firm. He's trying to get it launched and off the ground, so if a small firm like Westlake, Grahl, and Glover can assist in that effort, we love to step up and do that."

Jessica Bergem, a receptionist with the firm, brought her two daughters to volunteer with her.

“I think it’s a great thing to be able to help people and I wanted my kids to experience something, too. We had talked about trying to volunteer this year and doing something good for other people and this was just a really good opportunity.”