

Chef helps schools serve healthier meals



NAME CHRISTOPHER J. NEARY

TITLE CORPORATE EXECUTIVE CHEF

FIRM J. KINGS FOOD SERVICE PROFESSIONALS INC.

HONOR INVITED TO THE WHITE HOUSE TO KICK OFF THE "CHEFS MOVE TO SCHOOLS" PROGRAM

Christopher J. Neary, the corporate executive chef at J. Kings Food Service Professionals Inc. in Holtsville, was recently invited to the White House to kick off Michelle Obama's "Chefs Move to Schools" campaign.

As president of the American Culinary Federation's Long Island Chapter, Neary was one of about 1,000 chefs from around the U.S. chosen to be an ambassador for the program and to participate in the ceremony. The campaign is part of a larger program entitled "Let's Move," whose goal is to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation by helping kids become more physically active and eat healthier foods.

"Mrs. Obama spoke to us for about 45 minutes, and she stressed the importance of chefs volunteering their knowledge within their local communities," said Neary, who said he was impressed by the First Lady. "She seemed genuinely dedicated to the cause, and she seemed very at ease talking to us," he said. "I'm sure she has more important people to

meet than 1,000 chefs, but she spoke to us like she was one of us."

Neary contacted the other members of his ACF chapter, and they decided to each call on a list of schools in their area. "We'll let the schools know on an individual basis that we're here to help and that we can work with them and their food service providers to create menus that are healthy and affordable and that kids will like," he said.

Neary, who joined J. Kings in 2006 and oversees the company's culinary team, said he and his colleagues will also work with their customers that service school districts to develop healthier menus and create programs to educate students on how to make healthier choices.

Neary said schools should move away from less healthy practices like offering pizza three times a week to incorporate more fresh fruits and vegetables in the menu. To get kids excited about these foods, Neary said a salad bar option is one avenue to explore.

"Rather than giving kids a salad in a plastic container, salad bars are fun and they allow kids to pick their own toppings," said Neary, who also advocates offering more fruit options for dessert in lieu of items like doughnuts.

However, Neary isn't advocating doing away with kids' favorite staples altogether. "You have to give kids pizza and hot dogs once in a while," he said.

— BERNADETTE STARZEE