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## L.A. Parker: Trenton kids need to eat more veggies, ISLES Inc can help

*By L.A. Parker, The Trentonian*

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All mothers share one pleading instruction for their growing children: Eat your vegetables.

Such a challenge never posed a problem for this original Garden State farm boy, except when my mother placed a serving of okra in front of me. But even okra eventually became tolerable.

Vegetables are cool, gardening, too, especially during these hot summer days. Nothing delivers refreshment better than a nice salad packed with greens, zucchini, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, and an assortment of other items grown in neighborhood and backyard gardens or local farms.

No greater feeling exists than to walk out your backdoor for a shopping spree of peppers, eggplant, basil, corn, or a variety of herbs.

As this capital city attempts to rebound from economic, social, and educational peril, residents should consider physical fitness as a way to improve their quality of life.

According to the New Jersey Childhood Obesity Survey, conducted by Rutgers Center for State Health Policy, compared to the national data, a higher percentage of Trenton public school children in all age categories are overweight or obese.

Nearly 1 in 2 Trenton children in every age category (3-18) is overweight or obese, and more than 1 in 4 children in every age category is obese.

Only 14 percent of Trenton children over age 2 meet the recommendations for vegetable consumption.

This is especially true among non-Hispanic Black children, 41 percent of whom drink two or more sugar-sweetened beverages each day, compared to 28 percent of non-Hispanic White children and 11 percent of Hispanic children.

Trenton children ages 3 to 18 spend more time in sedentary activities and are less likely to be physically active at school compared to children in other New Jersey communities.

Lack of healthy choices in neighborhood stores and cost were the main reasons why almost 44 percent of the parents surveyed do not shop in their neighborhood.

Essentially, economic challenges magnify health issues. Plus, without better food choices, urban shoppers purchase vegetables in markets outside their neighborhoods.

Trenton needs people shopping inside city limits if it expects any significant economic revitalization.

Also, city residents can stretch their dollars if they accessed many garden growing initiatives offered through organizations such as ISLES, Inc.

ISLES, Inc. supports a more than 50-garden network throughout a Trenton offering technical support to corner plots or other growing initiatives stuffed into lots that cultivate both food and social interaction.

ISLES, Inc. hosts a Summer Garden Social Wednesday July 30th from 5-7 pm at Roberto Clemente Park Children's Garden (enter on Academy St. east of N Stockton St.)

It's not a requirement but you can make a food contribution that showcases your garden production.



ISLES, Inc. will provide a main dish as guests enjoy the park's shady gazebos, bamboo maze, butterfly garden, and even a swimming pool for kids.

RSVP with a call to 609-341-4773 or 341-4724 so that organizers know how much food to prepare.

St. Francis Medical Center supports healthy food initiatives with a sidewalk sale of vegetables and fruits Wednesdays (11 am-2 pm) on Chambers St. Next to the hospital.

Capital City Market: (July 10-Oct 30) offers another opportunity for residents to enjoy healthy food choices.

Held every Thursday between July and October, it runs from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Mill Hill Park on Front St.

The market features Jersey Fresh farm produce, arts and crafts, and entertainment.

So, let's celebrate summer with vegetables, fruits, and social interactions that strengthen both bodies and neighborhoods.

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