The Williams Company Store & Deli Joins EatWell Initiative



EatWell menu items are identified with an apple symbol, making it easy for customers to find healthy options.

Eat Well in Rural Minnesota

How often do you see fresh fruits and vegetables on restaurant menus in rural Minnesota? Dan and Marnie Whitehead, owners and managers of The Williams Company Store & Deli in Ottertail, Minn. have found their partnership with the EatWell initiative to help their menu stand out amongst the fried food venues commonly found in small towns.

The Williams Company Store & Deli occupies the town's original downtown general store selling unique gift shop items, while also operating a small deli and espresso bar. They have a loyal local following, but also rely on business from summer tourists.

PartnerSHIP 4 Health started working with The Williams Company Store in the fall of 2017, with the primary goal of incorporating more fruits and vegetables into their current menu. By assessing the store environment and available resources, recipes were identified that would complement their store and menu. Menu revisions resulted in adding overnight steel cut oats (cold and hot), yogurt parfaits with fresh fruit, whole fruit and vegetable smoothies, sides of fresh cut veggies and lowfat cottage cheese, summer grab-and-go, and new salads. The store also began to partner with Buehler's Produce, a farm also in Ottertail, to incorporate local foods into their recipes.

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The Mediterranean Salad features lettuce and microgreens from a local vegetable farm.

Menu Changes, Economic Gains

To support the healthy momentum, PartnerSHIP 4 Health provided strategic support funding to purchase four Vitamix blenders and to print new menus. The new menus were released in May 2019, and during the summer months (June – August 2019), the store saw a \$12,000 increase in their deli sales. "By partnering with PartnerSHIP 4 Health, we have tapped into a whole new revenue stream that brings people together for healthy reasons," states Marnie. "The demand for these items has also created a new job in our kitchen."

Customers have appreciated the healthy changes. One summer tourist said, "It is so nice to come to a restaurant in a resort town without bar food." They have found that offering samples to resistant customers has been effective in encouraging them to try new foods.

The Williams Company Store continues to move in a healthy direction. They plan to add energy snacks to their grab-and-go selections, new soups for the winter season, as well as promoting healthy options in their food truck next summer season.

If your business is interested in learning more about the EatWell initiative, contact our registered dietitian, Katrina Mouser, for more information.

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