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### Barre school lunch program finds a summer niche

July 1, 2008

By Mel Huff Times Argus Staff

BARRE – A small girl in a pink bathing suit padded up to a long table in the bath house of the city swimming pool and asked the man holding a pair of tongs, "Could I have a hamburger or hot dog?"

She took a paper plate with a grilled hamburger, walked past a tray of watermelon slices and large bowl of pasta salad and helped herself to a carton of milk buried in ice in a cooler at the end of a table.

The barbecue at the pool Monday marked the kickoff of the city's free summer lunch program, a crucial weapon in the fight against childhood hunger.

This year, Barre has six drop-in sites open to children 18 and under. The pool just began offering lunch and an afternoon snack as part of its program, joining Aldrich Library, Hedding United Methodist Church, Barre City Elementary School, Highgate Apartments, and Green Acres. There is no eligibility screening of children at any of the sites.

"We ask no questions," said Stephanie Quaranta, Barre's recreation director.

Northfield Boys and Girls Club and Brown Public Library in Northfield also provide meals that are open to all children. The county's open sites will serve meals for at least eight weeks.

Meals are being offered for the first time to children enrolled in shorter programs at three other sites: Barre Auditorium (the Frost Heaves camp), the Kellogg-Hubbard library in Montpelier, and Williamstown Elementary School's camp. Spaulding High School continues to provide meals for Rosie's Girls, and the Montpelier Recreation Department feeds it campers.

All in all, 13 sites in central Vermont now offer summer meals for children.

"We decided to open the pool at noontime so parents could come on their lunch hour and drop their children off," said Quaranta. "It makes it easier for the parents and children."

If it's raining, children can eat in the bath house or under the gazebo, she observed. If it's a very cold day or pouring rain and the pool is closed, children can eat at the elementary school.

"We're promoting it," Quaranta said of the meals program. "For parents, it's ideal."

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When both parents work, or if a family is headed by a single parent, it can be hard to make good lunches. "Now they can bring (their children) here and know that they'll get a healthy lunch and a good snack to hold them until mom or dad is home for dinner."

Menus, which are available at the pool, include chicken nuggets, turkey hoagies, chef salads, lasagna and baked barbecue chicken, plus salads, fresh fruits and fresh vegetables.

The food management company Fitz, Vogt and Associates provides the meals for the programs, said Steve Marinelli, the man behind the tongs and the company's northern Vermont manager. This is the first year the company has provided summer meals for the area. "We revamped the whole program," he said. "In years past, it was strictly cold meals. We offer hot meals three days a week."

Sarah Kunz, the summer nutrition outreach and policy specialist at the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, said her organization expects that up to 360 children will be fed daily through the Washington County programs this summer – 150 more than last summer.

Kunz believes that more Vermont families are struggling to put food on the table, based on the increased use of Food Stamps, which is nearing record levels, and the growing number of families turning to food shelves.

The number of children who rely on free and reduced-price school meals – another measure of food insecurity – is sobering. In Barre City, 761 students use the school meals program. In Washington County as a whole, the number is more than 2,300. During summer vacation, that food is no longer available.

"National studies show that summer is really a high-risk time for kids," Kunz observed. "Especially, low-income kids are at risk of falling behind academically and tend to put on weight at two to three times the rate that they do during the academic year. What we know is that the summer food program is really protective."

A 2006 study published in the Journal of Children and Poverty found that food insecurity rates go up during the summer months, and that the impact is greatest in households with children. The same study concluded that food insecurity was mitigated in states with high participation in the federal summer food program.

"In addition to providing a consistent source of nutrition," Kunz noted, "all of the summer meals programs in Washington County have some kind of fun enrichment or activities that go with the meal, so they're feeding kids' bellies and also feeding their minds and providing a place for kids to socialize."

Squeals rising from the pool, Quaranta said that the meals program complements her exercise programs – swimming, volleyball and basketball – in building healthy children.

"The food's a hit. It's very rewarding," she said. "I got out on the playground and round them all up, and once they understand it's a free meal, they're like 'Wow!' They're so appreciative – their faces just light right up!"



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## Reader comments

It is wonderful to see organizations and service providers in the city working together for such a great cause. Everyone should be commended for this effort. Great job! I also appreciate the Times Argus reporting on the good in our community.

-- Posted by **Christine Peterson** on Tue, Jul 1, 2008, 3:48 pm EST [[report this comment](#)]

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<http://frac.org/> Info for those that 'need' to know where the MONEY is coming from to feed HUNGRY CHILDREN.

-- Posted by **Melissa B.** on Tue, Jul 1, 2008, 10:36 am EST [[report this comment](#)]

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this is wonderful, I'm glad the whole world isn't like EMT who hates poor people.

-- Posted by **Melissa B.** on Tue, Jul 1, 2008, 10:18 am EST [[report this comment](#)]

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OK..so..where's the money coming for this? I noticed that bit of info was absent.

I guess while we are at it, we should educate these children on the merits of a good job BEFORE having children. Perhaps I'm old fashioned, but my Mother would have had a stroke if us kids ever left the house hungry. In fact, she made sure she was around when we were out of school.

I guess I missed the memo on taking responsibility for everyone else's kids..makes that statement that "it takes a village to raise a child" have a whole new meaning..

-- Posted by **patriotemt** on Tue, Jul 1, 2008, 6:22 am EST [[report this comment](#)]

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