

Bloomfield Hills chef hosts recipe contest for local middle schools

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By **MONICA DRAKE**
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This semester, several local middle school students will learn something many adults don't know how to do — cook and create their own recipes using fresh ingredients.

So far, middle schools in Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, Troy and Swartz Creek have signed up to start after school clubs to teach students to make their own recipes. The students, between the ages of 10 and 15 years old, will meet about once a week. In the summer, they will compete against each other in a cooking competition in the stadium kitchen at Henry Ford Hospital in West Bloomfield.

“Clash of the Cooking Crews” is the brainchild of Bloomfield Hills resident John Prepolec, also known as “Johnny Prep.” Prepolec is a popular cooking coach with more than 10,000 “likes” on Facebook and hosts the show Soup and Company on Bloomfield Community Television. He is looking for middle schools throughout metro Detroit to participate in the contest this semester and in the fall.

“Kids have a much greater ability to influence each other than (adults) do,” said Prepolec, a former engineer.

“What we need to do to get kids to eat healthy is make it popular within their own peer group. We want kids to think it's cool and to tell each other that it's cool.”

Each school will create a breakfast, lunch and snack recipe within nutritional guidelines. Students will also create a promotional video selling their product to other kids. One school group will be the grand prize winner, and there will be winners for each category. Some of the prizes will be concert tickets, sports tickets and clothing gift cards.

“We're trying to get the students in the kitchen and get them engaged because the childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes



trends in this country are scary," Prepolec said. "Kids eat so much processed carbs, and it's terrible for their glycemic index. ... I'm doing everything I can to get kids excited about it."

Bloomfield Hills Middle School Principal Kaarin Averill said 12 kids have joined their cooking club so far. The group started meeting in February. They are currently working on a recipe for a breakfast parfait.

"For the last four weeks, some of our kids have been experimenting with changing the elements in the granola recipe. We're a nut restricted school, so we're not putting nuts in the granola. They're experimenting with maple syrup, brown sugar, cinnamon and adding orange zest," said Averill. "Do we use strawberries, blueberries, bananas or kiwis? There's a lot of elements they've been experimenting with."

The school's Parent Teacher Organization is funding the ingredients for the club.

This is the second time Bloomfield Hills Middle School has participated in one of Prepolec's ideas. The first was "Veggie Wars," where students sold asparagus, carrots and broccoli during their lunch hour. And the vegetables sold out in the cafeteria — selling even more than the French fries.

"We found with Veggie Wars that if we give kids the chance to cook, make the recipe and promote the vegetable, other kids were more likely to try it," said Averill. "That's what we're trying to educate them about — you can eat good food that tastes good and that's healthy for you."

For those interested in starting a cooking club at their schools and participating in the "Clash of the Cooking Crews," email jprepolec@comcast.net. For more information about John Prepolec, visit johnnyprep.net.

Contact Monica Drake at 248-745-4687 or email her at monica.drake@oakpress.com. Find her on Twitter at [monica_adele](https://twitter.com/monica_adele).