

For the *Village Vision*, Sept. 2007 ...

By Senator Dede Feldman

North Valley Schools to Pilot “Healthy Kids-Healthy Economy” Program

Schools are starting up again in Los Ranchos and all over the North Valley this fall with some new funding for a pilot program that will provide fresh fruits and vegetables for our kids while stimulating local agriculture at the same time. The program, called Healthy Kids-Healthy Economy is something I’ve been working on for several years now.

It’s part of two larger crusades. The first is to address the alarming epidemic of obesity and diabetes among students that seems to be spreading statewide. Twenty four percent of New Mexico high school students 15% of elementary kids are overweight—double and triple the rates of twenty years ago. TV advertising and junk foods at home and in the schools are taking their toll. Two years ago, with the help of a coalition of parents, pediatricians and others called NM Action for Healthy Kids, and Rep. Tom Swisstack, (D-Rio Rancho), I sponsored a bill to ban the sale of sodas and other junk food in the schools. With heavy opposition from the soft drink industry and some who felt extra-curricular sales of candy and snacks was essential to sports and after-school programs, the bill failed. But, like so many things in the legislature, it had unexpected consequences. It prompted the Department of Education to move to restrict the sale of soft drinks and other foods that did not meet minimum nutritional standards. APS and other schools responded to the new regulations last year.

The second crusade is an attempt to preserve local agriculture here in the North and South Valley, as well as around the state, by providing new markets for locally grown products. Local farmers’ markets like the vibrant one here in Los Ranchos provide markets to some small-scale growers, but, for a more constant customer, what better place to start than the schools? Here in Los Ranchos, we’re fortunate to have local efforts like Los Poblanos Organics and Rio Grande Community Farms growing wonderful crops. Shouldn’t our kids be eating them? Won’t that eventually encourage more land left in cultivation rather than sprouting new houses? That’s the philosophy behind the Healthy Schools-Healthy Economy initiative, a public private push from local farmers, nutrition advocates the NM Department of Agriculture, the NM Task Force to End Hunger and others. This year, the group came to the legislature with a request for \$1.4 for schools to serve at least two lunches a week featuring New Mexico grown produce.

The larger request was not included in the budget but I was able to obtain \$85,000 for a pilot program for the Valley Cluster schools, including Los Ranchos Alameda, Taft and Alvarado. The seed money will be used to buy baby carrots, apples, pears, watermelons, cantaloupes, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, grapes, zucchini and peaches for school meals and snacks served to the 5,800 kids in the Valley Cluster. The Department of Agriculture and APS have promised that, as much as possible, the food will come from farms near the North Valley. The pilot project is slated to start September 7. Bon Appetit!

Tools You Can Use

The Nurse Advise Line (1-877-725-2552) is entering its second year. It's open 24:7 for medical questions on anything from a sick baby to side effects from medication. Designed two years ago to prevent visits to the emergency room and help people who have no access to a doctor, the line has received tens of thousands of calls. The number is **1-877-725-2552**.

Protect yourself against identity theft by **freezing access to your credit report** by those who have no business there. A bill I passed this year, with the help of the Attorney General and Sen. Bill Sharer (R-Farmington) allows you to pro-actively prevent unauthorized access to your credit report so people can't open accounts or make purchases in your name. You can also quickly unfreeze access if you're making a major purchase. For details on how to do this call the AG's office at 222-9000 or go to my web site at www.dedefeldman.com.