

Kitchen of Life program teaches resilience, cooking skills

JAN LEIBOVITZ ALLOY

Kitchen of Life lessons were already cooking by the time dignitaries arrived or the program's Aug. 2 launch. As guests were directed upstairs for the ribbon cutting, Whitehall School District students on the main floor broke into small groups to discuss their first lesson in social-emotional learning involving empathy for others. Later, they joined the group upstairs, in a setting that mirrors TV-show cooking stations, for their first culinary lesson, baking cranberry oat muffins.

Kitchen of Life, a culinary arts program hosted by the Lori Schottenstein Chabad Center in New Albany, will provide teens with cooking skills. Perhaps more importantly, the Bexley based program will teach resiliency skills to teens in school systems throughout central Ohio.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five children has or, later in life, will develop a debilitating mental illness. Kitchen of Life's immersive program is designed to reduce that risk



Jeffrey Schottenstein discusses the importance of mental health care. | Photos/Lori Spolter

"Why do we have to wait till it gets to that life-threatening point?" asked Jeffrey Schottenstein in remarks before the ribbon cutting. "Today we are going to change that;"

Schottenstein, CEO of the TACKMA sportswear brand, founded The Ohio State University Jeffrey Schottenstein Program for Resilience in response to his own struggle with mental illness.

"I was blessed to have a family where I had the resources to be able to get

help;" Schottenstein said. "There's so many others out there that don't have the resources or the means to get the help, and this is what we're here to conquer!"

Kitchen of Life will save lives by reaching youth early, said Shea Kaltmann, the program's director.

"To have the feeling of belonging and acceptance and knowing that your voice matters is vital for mental wellness and is something our program stresses. Every student that walks through our doors will be able to walk away from the program with a new and uplifting experience, creating a new perspective on life;"

That sentiment was echoed by speaker after speaker.

Ohio Sen. Matt Dolan R-Chagrin Falls, explained how the state Senate assesses programs to support. "Is there leadership? Is there a mission? And is there value?" he asked, adding Kitchen of Life checks every box.



Kitchen of Life Chef James Warner helps Whitehall students and staff with the first baking project.

Kitchen of Life *From Page 1*

To emphasize the Senate's nonpartisan support of the program, Dolan invited counterparts of both parties—Sen. Jay Hottinger, R-Newark, Sen. Stephanie Kunze, R-Hilliard and Sen. Hearcel Craig, D-Columbus—to the stage as he spoke.

“Every child should see tomorrow as a better day than today;’ Dolan said. “And we saw value in the intrinsic learning, the tangible asset, learning a skill. We’re teaching them to make food, to create sustenance, to provide for others. You don’t just cook for yourself, you cook for others. So when the Senate looks at projects like this, it was a no-brainer to invest in;’

In a phone interview, Craig pointed to the success of LifeTown Columbus, a life-skills program directed by Shea Kaltmann's parents, Rabbi Areyah and Esther Kaltmann, at the New Albany location. When the Kaltmanns are involved, projects are run with integrity and passion, he said.

“They’re committed to families and children” Craig said. “I have been with them when they’re working with mental health disorders and differently abled.



Shea Kaltmann, Kitchen of Life's program director, explains positive impacts of the new program. | Photos/Lori Spolter

With this project, it's an opportunity for government and business to come together to build ladders of support'

Whitehall Superintendent of Schools Sharee Wells also acknowledged experience with LifeTown in the school system's decision to partner with Kitchen of Life. Whitehall plans to incorporate the program into its freshman orientation. Wells thanked Kitchen of Life for teaching the kinds of emotional regulation, social skills and

collaboration that students need but don't find in the classroom.

From the stage, she spoke directly to her students: “Our trailblazing opportunity will give you not only skills for your freshman year but skills that will take you well beyond. So, listen, engage fully, represent well-and remember that people in the room may be your mentors;’

Jan Leibovitz Alloy is a freelance journalist.



Various attendees of the grand opening, including Director Shea Kaltmann, from left, Rabbi Areyah Kaltmann, ADAMH director of faith-based and community engagement Dorothy Malone, TACKMA CEO Jeffrey Schottenstein, Whitehall Schools Superintendent Sharee Wells, Sen. Hearcel Craig, D-Columbus, Matt Dolan R-Chagrin Falls, Sen. Stephanie Kunze, R-Hilliard, Sen. Jay Hottinger, R-Newark and NorthSteppe Realty broker Michael Stickney. | Photos/Lori Spolter