

The Register-Guard

Dari Mart welcomes mobile produce stand to parking lot

The offerings of fruit and vegetables are part of an initiative to bring healthy food to convenience stores

By Jack Moran

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SPRINGFIELD — Every Wednesday this summer, Jack Richardson is bringing organic produce to a most unlikely place: a Dari Mart parking lot in west Springfield.

Richardson, whose family owns McKenzie River Organic Farm near Leaburg, is making weekly stops at the Dari Mart at 1243 Rainbow Drive as part of an effort to offer healthy food at convenience stores located in three neighborhoods in the Eugene-Springfield area where nutritious, affordable groceries are hard to find.

In what's known as the Healthy Corner Stores Initiative, dozens of hometown health organizations throughout the United States have recently convinced convenience store owners to begin carrying fresh produce and wholesome snacks as alternatives to junk food.

But the local version of that project — spearheaded by the Lane Coalition for Healthy Active Youth — is a little bit different from the rest.

“This is definitely unique,” said Kayla Schott-Bresler, who is coordinating the project for the coalition, a Eugene nonprofit group that works to prevent childhood obesity and related health problems.

The project in Lane County is one of just a few nationwide that involves a chain of stores — in this case, Dari Mart — whose owners are interested in participating.

And it's the only one that Schott-Bresler knows of that involves a mobile produce stand such as the one that Richardson uses.

Richardson rebuilt a 1949 GMC pickup that has a flatbed on which he carries a huge load of salad greens, cucumbers, squash and whatever else is in season at his family's farm.

He first visited the Dari Mart on Rainbow Drive on June 22. About 80 customers purchased fruit and vegetables from his mobile stand during the two-hour stop, Schott-Bresler said.

Richardson plans to continue parking outside the store on Wednesday afternoons through September.

Schott-Bresler said her organization is now working with Dari Mart to bring a menu of healthy groceries into its stores in two west Eugene neighborhoods where the “retail food landscape” is somewhat bleak, nutritionally speaking.

Those locales include an area along the Highway 99 corridor, as well as the Trainsong neighborhood.

The neighborhoods were chosen for the project based on age and income demographics, input from Dari Mart officials and proximity to supermarkets.

Schott-Bresler said her group spoke with customers of the Dari Mart on Rainbow Drive earlier this year. Most of those people indicated they would buy produce at the convenience store if they could, she said.

Schott-Bresler said many people in the neighborhood reported that they regularly shop at a traditional grocery store once every few weeks, and visit Dari Mart whenever they find themselves in a food pinch.

For some, that means buying a bag of chips or a candy bar instead of something more vitamin-packed.

The project is being funded through a \$180,000, three-year grant from the Northwest Health Foundation and a \$21,210 grant from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

Fresh food at Dari Mart

WHAT: A grand opening event for McKenzie River Organic Farm's mobile produce stand

WHERE: Dari Mart, 1243 Rainbow Drive, Springfield

WHEN: 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Wednesday

DETAILS: Organic produce is being offered this summer outside the convenience store as part of a project to make fresh, healthy food available in neighborhoods where nutritious food is hard to find. Local elected officials plan to attend the grand opening, and prizes will be awarded to attendees.

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