

Redlands launches expanded free summer meal program

By Kristina Hernandez, Redlands Daily Facts

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(Redlands, CA) Brittainy Wilson believes a hearty meal is essential to “brain balance.”

So when she heard of a [new summer meal program coming to Redlands](#), the mom of four knew just where to turn.

“This is awesome,” the Redlands woman said at a kickoff celebration for the free lunch program Wednesday afternoon at Community Park. “Something like this most definitely helps because it is a big expense having (my kids) in the kitchen all day long.”

The program, which officially began Monday, is a collaboration between the Redlands Parks and Recreation Department and the Redlands Unified School District. It is made possible by a \$30,000 grant from the National League of Cities, which recently selected Redlands to participate in the 2016-17 Cities Combating Hunger through Afterschool and Summer Meal Programs (CHAMPS), according to the city.

The \$30,000 grant allowed the expansion of the program this summer with the purchase of two mobile kitchens that will be set up at Redlands Community Center, 111 W. Lugonia Ave., and Community Park, 1535 N. Church St.

Lunches will be served from noon to 1:30 p.m. weekdays at the Community Center through Aug. 4 and at Community Park through July 28. Each meal comes with an entree — hamburgers, hot dogs, cheeseburgers and “rib-a-q” sandwiches are options — fruit and vegetables, and a choice of either milk or water.

On Wednesday, hundreds were served at both sites. Attendees included Wilson and her four children at the park and members of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Redlands-Riverside’s Hansberger Clubhouse at the community center.

Betty Crocker, Redlands Unified’s director of child nutrition services, and other program organizers were thrilled with the turnout so far.

“In our state 1-in-4 kiddos knows hunger and in the summer that number is more pronounced,” Crocker said. “These summer meals are a big deal in our community because it is the first time the kiddos have had access to any kind of community summer feeding.

“It was my dream from day one (with the district) to feed kiddos during the summer,” she said.

Wednesday's kickoff celebration at Community Park featured various vendor booths and activities for all ages, including hula hooping and interactions with law enforcement agencies, such as the Redlands Police Department. The A.K. Smiley Public Library and YMCA of the East Valley were also in attendance.

The city's recreation department hosts various activities throughout the year. A look at those activities may be found online at www.cityofredlands.org.

To learn more about the barbecue lunches, call 909-798-7579.