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Child nutrition chief earns national credential

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By **GREGG L. PARKER**

For the **Madison Spirit** writeone35758@yahoo.com

Marty Tatara makes the grade when it comes to child nutrition.

Tatara, the supervisor of the child nutrition program for Madison City Schools, passed the School Nutrition Association's credentials exam for which she had to know about Alabama's child nutrition practices and about procedures from across the country.

"It's a national test about different ways to manage menus. In the South, we use food-based method. The West Coast uses nutrient-standard planning," said Tatara, also a registered dietitian and licensed dietitian. "It wasn't about just my niche in Madison, Alabama."

The test demanded intense study for Tatara. Much of the testing dealt with a comprehensive understanding of the nutrition program's long-running history "from a common sense standpoint. The other side involves lots of facts and figures, the business standpoint," she said.

She took the exam in New Orleans in January and attended an industry conference. As a school nutrition specialist, she joins other professionals with commitments to providing nutritious school meals that help students build lifelong healthy eating habits.

"This national certification is the highest you achieve for a child nutrition director," she said. "It has always been a career goal."

In 2008, Tatara led the school system to receive the Golden Award from the Food and Nutrition Services division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The award recognized nutritious cafeteria meals and wellness study in Madison.

Madison City Schools' food service program serves 163,000 lunches each school year to a student population of 8,400.

"An outstanding child nutrition program consistently puts students first and focuses on quality food and high nutritional standards," Tatara said.

Tatara earned a bachelor's degree in nutrition and foods from Auburn University. She completed registered dietitian requirements with an internship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where she was named most outstanding intern.

She serves on the Alabama State Procurement Committee that selects food for bids and UAB's selection committee for dietitian internships. She is the regional chairwoman of Action for Healthy Kids.

Her husband, Jim, is a deputy program manager with Qualis Corp. for the Ares spacecraft program. Their son Joey is a sophomore at Auburn University.

Her career started with dietetics for nursing homes. She became supervisor of the child nutrition program for Madison County Schools in 1988. She accepted her current position in 1998 when the Madison city system was founded.

Today, her work faces Alabama's proration "that has hit hard. Approximately \$150,000 has been cut since last year," she said. "We're in survival mode."

Madison's nutrition staff won't relinquish "good things we've established. We must be as absolutely productive as possible." Tatara also must consider the new cafeteria at Mill Creek Elementary School.

Luckily, she doesn't see additional meal price increases in the near future. "I don't see placing any more undue burden on our community," Tatara said.

For more information about the School Nutrition Association, visit www.schoolnutrition.org.

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