ACAP’s Early Care & Education Center in Caribou celebrates Best Tasting Water with Let’s Go! activities

PRESQUE ISLE – It came as a pleasant surprise to Aroostook County Action Program to learn in December that their Early Care and Education Center located on Bowles Road in Caribou had received an award for having the best tasting filtered water in the state, and on Wednesday, Jan. 16, kids and staff at the center hosted a water party in honor of the award bringing in ACAP’s Let’s Go! program to aid in the celebration.

Russell Plourde, owner of RP Water Quality Monitoring, LLC in Caribou, is the state-licensed operator in charge of ACAP’s well at the Bowles Road location. Unbeknownst to ACAP, he submitted a water sample from the Center’s well into the statewide contest and it won. In fact, in February, the state champion water moves on to compete in a national contest.

The award is significant in more than one way to ACAP. First, it wasn’t so long ago, before installation of the existing state-of-the-art UV filtration system several years ago, that the water at the center was not so tasty, or perhaps even safe, to drink. Department Director of Early Care and Education Sue Powers recalls a time when staff had to haul bottled water to the site for the kids to drink.

While the water is obviously no longer a problem, the fact that it is Best Tasting in the state makes ACAP Community Educator for Let’s Go! happy because one of the goals of her program is to encourage kids to drink more water, and having the best tasting water is a great way to do just that.

“The Let’s GO! program encourages kids to drink zero sugary drinks, and we like to provide more readily accessible water as part of that effort,” said Katie Putnam, ACAP community educator for the Let’s Go! program. “Water provides a low cost, zero calorie beverage option and is a healthy alternative to sugary drinks. Drinking water is linked to a number of health benefits. It can improve kids’ readiness to learn and is the best first choice for hydration before, during and after most exercise routines.”

Limiting sugary drinks is a key way to promote healthy eating and prevent excess weight gain in kids. Research shows that sugary drinks contribute to childhood obesity. Sugary drinks provide a lot of calories very quickly. This is a problem because it’s easy to drink more than your body needs before your body had a chance to signal that it is full. Also, sugary drinks are usually additions to your regular diet, adding calories that your body does not need. A 12-ounce service of soda had the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar. One service of soda per day could lead to a 15-pound weight gain in one year. Each additional daily serving of soda increases a child’s risk of obesity by 60%.

ACAP provides equal opportunity in employment and services
Putnam felt the award offered a perfect opportunity to turn the unexpected recognition into an event to celebrate water and promote the Let’s Go! concept of 5-2-1-0 (five or more servings of fruits and veggies each day, two hours or less of screen time, one hour or more of physical activity, and zero sugary drinks).

Children at the center celebrated the water with music and dancing, an award presentation, and plenty of the center’s water, some of which was flavored with fruits or vegetables. Why flavor the best tasting water in the state?

“My thought was that we would show kids how to make the already great tasting water have different flavors to further encourage them to avoid sugary sweetened beverages, while also adding a fruit or vegetable, which is in line with the Let’s Go! message of (5) five fruits and vegetables every day. This would also be an activity the kids could do at home with their parents,” said Putnam.

Plourde presented a plaque to staff at the Caribou site and a traveling trophy that the Center will display until a new winner is chosen next year.

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ACAP is celebrating 46 Years of Making Life Better in Aroostook County! ACAP provides the people of Aroostook County with services and resources that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, and workforce development services. For more information on ACAP, or to make a tax-deductible contribution, please contact the agency at 771 Main Street, on the web at www.acap-me.org, or by calling 764-3721.