

Health nut

Naperville nutritionist finds many forums to promote sensible eating

By Susan Dibble

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Neighbor to know

If Naperville resident Christine Palumbo hadn't been so afraid of taking a college chemistry course in quantitative analysis, she might not be the nationally noted nutritionist she is today.

A student at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn., Palumbo set out to be a medical technologist. But rather than taking the dreaded quantitative analysis class, she switched majors. She tried out several before a conversation with another student in the cafeteria introduced her to the field of dietetics.

Investigating further, Palumbo decided it offered everything she wanted — food, nutrition, a clinical aspect and science.

"That was my strength, science," she said.

The rest is — well, not quite history.

Back then, most registered dietitians worked in hospitals and that's where Palumbo began her career.

But she has since talked about the need for hydration on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," debated the late Dr. Robert Atkins about his low-carbohydrate diet on Channel 11 and interviewed scientists from around the world for her column in Allure magazine.

She writes for FoodFIT.com and authors a new, monthly "Good sense eating" column for Chicago Parent magazine.

A speaker, writer, media spokeswoman, frequent guest on Chicago television, private nutrition consultant and board member of the American Dietetic Association — Palumbo says one thing led to another.

"For me, it's just been networking and showing up," she said. "I consider myself extremely fortunate to be one of those people who can't wait to begin my day."

Palumbo left her full-time career as a hospital dietitian when the first of her three children was born. But she remained active in the American Dietetic Association and earned a master's degree in business administration. After several years of child-rearing, she resumed work as a part-time consultant.

Now when she teaches a writing course to nutrition students at Benedictine University in Lisle, she also tries to open their eyes to the possibilities their careers could entail.

"Think big," she says. "Don't limit yourself."

Palumbo understands the challenges modern life poses to good nutrition — too many sugary drinks for children, too-large portion sizes in restaurants, too little time to cook and too much reliance on prepared foods.

Maybe that's why her favorite role is that of public speaker — translating research on nutrition into tips audience members can use in their everyday lives. Her topics include "Is Your Job Making You Fat/Diet Wreckers in Your Desk," "Defensive Dining: How to Eat Out & Keep Your Waistline" and "Meal Solutions for Busy People."

Palumbo has done corporate consulting for companies such as McDonald's and Sara Lee, and maintains a private practice consulting with individuals.

Arnold Stenvog of Darien came to Palumbo a year ago for help losing weight and with the hope that better eating habits would keep his diabetes under control.

Stenvog said he has met his weight goal, rarely eats some of the foods that used to get him in trouble, and consumes more vegetables, fruits and whole grains than he did before.

"She didn't nag me. She treated me like an adult," Stenvog said. "She knows her stuff."

Naperville resident Marilyn Dale starting seeing Palumbo two months ago about her high cholesterol. Dale said their sessions have resulted in her making more conscious food choices instead of grabbing on the go when she's hungry.

"She's one of the people who interprets 'diet' not in terms of deprivation ... but the choices you're making," Dale said.

Palumbo said she can relate to her clients' struggles — she likes sweets, pizza and chips herself.

"I will be the first one to say I do not eat perfectly," she said. "I have to work out. Otherwise I would gain weight."

With a heritage that is half Italian, one-fourth Greek and a quarter Lithuanian, Palumbo is a big fan of the Mediterranean diet and the health benefits it offers.

Palumbo enjoys eating out but says she prefers her own home cooking.

"I'm renowned for my soups and salads," she said.

Palumbo has passed on her love of cooking and eating to her three children, particularly the two older ones who are now in their 20s.

"It's not unusual for them to call me from the aisles of their grocery stores," she said.

For more information about Palumbo's services, visit her Web site at www.christinepalumbo.com.