

Neighbors

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Neighbors **IN THE COMMUNITY**

The Dinner Station promotes healthy meals

STAFF REPORT

The Institute of Medicine reported recently that by 2010, one in five children will be obese. Such an alarming statistic is sure to make families reconsider their eating habits. The reality is that most families eat too much fast food. For many, it's an issue of time, finding time to plan meals and cook becomes increasingly difficult with long workdays and busy schedules. So, how can families avoid becoming just another statistic?

Many families have discovered meal assembly as a way to keep up with their fast-paced lifestyles and still eat healthy. For example, The Dinner Station allows families to prepare up to 16 meals in as little as two hours since the grocery shopping, meal planning and slicing is all done for you. Meals are simply prepared, taken home, frozen and cooked as needed. And, best of all, families can enjoy their meals at the dinner table as a family.

Bringing families back to the dinner table is actually one of the Center for Alcohol and Substance

Abuse's missions. In fact, Sept. 25 was Family Day and on it, CASA lead a national effort to encourage families to eat dinner with their children. Studies show that increased communication between parents and children leads to reduced alcohol and substance abuse among youngsters. And, conversations at the dinner table help parents learn more about their children's lives and struggles.

The founders of The Dinner Station, Kristi Long and Amy Cole, are also determined to introduce children as young as 5 years old to cooking to encourage healthy eating habits at an early age. In 2006, they launched Conductor Camp and Junior Chef programs, as well as Kids' Kits.

"Cooking, or at least helping prepare meals, helps develop math and fine motor skills and gives children an essential tool for healthy living. Kids are also more willing to try new foods if they help select and prepare them," said Long.

■ For more information, visit www.thedinnerstation.com.



DALLAS MORNING NEWS FILE PHOTO

MOVE TOWARD HEALTHIER TIMES: Too many families, like the one shown above, consume their evening meals in a fast food restaurant. A new movement spurred by reports citing the nation's growing obesity favors the return of families to the dinner table so that they may eat healthier meals.