

All aboard for Dinner Station's Conductor Camp

05:04 PM CDT on Friday, July 21, 2006

By **KELLY VALE** / Neighbors Assistant Editor

If you are still looking for a fun and educational activity to do with your children before school starts, look no further than The Dinner Station's Conductor Camp.

The Dinner Station, located in Highland Village, is a unique place where people can prepare their own seemingly complicated — but deceptively simple — meals by following easy recipes and freezing the meals for later use.

For the remainder of July through August, The Dinner Station is offering Conductor Camps and Jr. Chef sessions to help kids get involved in preparing meals.

Conductor Camp is for younger children, ages 5 to 12. Children and parents move through five stations and learn about kitchen safety, food and nutrition, table manners and etiquette, measuring and following recipes. At each station there is an experiment or activity to complete. For example, at the food and nutrition station, children read about the new food pyramid and draw a picture of a balanced meal. They then conduct an experiment to learn about digestion by dissolving a banana in lemon-lime soda (stomach acid) and using paper towels to represent stomach lining. The kids are amazed as they see how their food is digested. These hands-on lessons really let the children get involved and learn what food preparation is all about.

The founders of The Dinner Station, Amy Cole and Kristy Long, wanted to offer a summer-time activity that could provide children with life-long benefits.

“We wanted something that was not only fun, but also educational,” Long said.

The last station teaches children how to follow recipes and prepare a menu with chicken pot pie and dirt cake. The last station seemed to be the favorite by far. Both parents and kids really enjoyed making something together, and the children beamed proud smiles as they held up their completed projects.

Not only is making the recipes fun, but it encourages children to expand their palates. Not one child resisted adding peas and carrots to their pot pie. It is long said that if children are an integral part of selecting and preparing meals, they are usually more open to try new things and therefore eat healthier.

A wonderful bonus for the parents is getting to spend one-on-one time with the children. Sessions allow parents to not only teach important lessons, but also to enjoy watching their children grow. Corie Sarver and her daughter, Carson, attended Conductor Camp twice because they had such a great time the first time.

Children who are 12 and older can attend Jr. Chef sessions. These sessions are great for children who are interested and able to help in the kitchen. It allows them to help their parents prepare dinner for the month and also make a dirt cake to take home.

The cost is \$30 per child for the Conductor Camp, and parents can attend the camp with up to two children at a time. Each child gets to take home a conductor hat, T-shirt and train whistle.

The Dinner Station will continue to offer these camps after school starts for groups or parties. For example, groups like Girl Scout troops can use the programs to earn cooking badges, or schools can send groups for field trips.

The Dinner Station in Highland Village is the original store. It opened in June 2004. Since then, nine other locations have opened throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The Dinner Station creates a fun environment for preparing delicious meals made with quality ingredients. Just sign-up online and then come to the kitchen empty-handed. In about 2 hours, participants leave with eight, 12 or 16 full- or half-sized meals that are ready to cook when needed.

For more information about The Dinner Station and their programs for children, visit www.thedinnerstation.com.

Kelly Vale is the assistant editor for Southern Denton County Neighbors. Information for this article was contributed by Kristi Long, co-creator.