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---Daily Herald---11/3/2021

Where's the peanut butter? Supply shortages are changing food menus at some suburban schools

By Madhu Krishnamurthy



Paul Valade/pvalade@dailyherald.com, 2020Quest Food Management Services employees Tim Almy, left, and Vicky Shargo package breakfast and lunch meals for the grab-and-go free meal distribution program at Glenbrook South High School in Glenview last school year. This year, nationwide supply-chain issues are causing a scarcity of food items and related products.

From skipping peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to altering food menus in school cafeterias, suburban districts are scrambling to find enough supplies to feed students amid global supply-chain interruptions.

With pandemic-related labor shortages, food distributors and manufacturers are struggling to find assembly line workers and truck drivers to deliver their products to consumers. Those supply-chain issues are expected to worsen in coming months.

Nationwide, schools are facing shortages of certain cafeteria staples: chicken, beef, turkey, eggs, bread, apple juice, vegetables, pancakes, waffles, paper plates and plastic cutlery.

"Paper goods is where we are really struggling," said Elena Hildreth, director of food and nutrition services for **Elgin Area School District U-46**.

While securing supplies of plates, trays and napkins has been a challenge, for a while the state's second-largest school district was scrounging for peanut butter.

That's when district officials got creative.

U-46's produce purveyor, Get Fresh Produce Inc. of Bartlett, was able to secure peanut butter in bulk.

Then its fresh bread vendor, Chicago-based Alpha Baking Co., helped get freshly made pizza crusts from Olympia Foods of Franklin Park by the truckload for its secondary schools. And uniform supplier Warehouse Direct of Des Plaines now is finding U-46's paper plates, Hildreth said.

"We've tried to think outside of the box and reach out to business partners and allow them to help source items that they don't normally carry," she said.

Finding substitutes for favorite menu items can be difficult, but that doesn't mean kids are going hungry. U-46 serves more than 12,000 breakfasts, nearly 26,000 lunches, and between 3,000 and 4,000 suppers daily.

"We have plenty of food," Hildreth said. "Nobody is going hungry. It is free breakfast and free lunch for every single student, and we are prepared for that. The entrees is where we are really struggling, anything that is requiring any type of processing ... whether it is chopped, diced, precooked, that's where we're seeing most of the challenges. Everyone's in the same boat."

At Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211, officials are seeing shortages in beef, chicken, juice, breakfast items and nonfood supplies.

"It's not surprising to receive a delivery with only half the number of items ordered," spokeswoman Erin Holmes said. "Planning ahead is a necessity. Costs continue to increase. For the past month we've received several notices weekly from vendors of price increases."

Getting into the winter months and holiday season, suburban school officials are bracing for a greater scarcity of goods and more frequent menu changes.

"When it comes to providing meals for students, we have had minor substitutions here and there, but have only needed to swap out a side item (vegetable or fruit) to this point," said Brooke Hagstrom, spokeswoman for Woodland District 50 in Gurnee.

But officials are working on stockpiling larger quantities of some items, such as plates and napkins, to stave off future shortages.

"We are gearing up to order what we need for next school year several months earlier than we normally would," Hagstrom said.

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New labor contract approved by District U-46

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

The **Board of Education in School District U-46** unanimously approved a three-year contract with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) which includes automatic pay raises, regardless of performance, at its meeting on Monday, Oct. 4.

The contract will run through 2024 according to Trisha Olson, chief legal officer.

"The agreement was negotiated in June of 2021 and ratified by the union members on Sept. 24, 2021," Olson said.

In a memo, Olson wrote: "From a fiscal standpoint, new starting wages are implemented for all employees. For 2022 through 2023, all employees who had a proficient or better will get a 3 [percent] increase to their hourly wages, and those with a less than proficient will get a 1.5 [percent] increase. For 2022 through 2023, new hires will be placed at the starting wage. For 2023-2024, all employees who had a proficient or better will get a 2.5 [percent] increase to their hourly wages, and those with a less than proficient will get a 1.25 [percent] increase." The starting wage will increase from \$17.50 to \$18 an hour for cook IIs, \$17 to \$17.50 for cooks along with satellite leaders and material expeditors, \$16.50 to \$17 for bakers as well as material stockers and assistant cooks, \$15.25 to \$16 for elementary leads, \$14.50 to \$15 for café relief and \$14 to \$15 for elementary assistant leads.

Sue Kerr, the board's president, claimed: "We should also note that this addresses minimum wage concerns that might happen in the future."

However, there was no immediate need to increase starting wages for any of the positions to match Illinois' new minimum wage rates which are \$11 an hour for 2021, \$12 for 2022, \$13 for 2023 and \$14 for 2024.

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District U-46 seeking funds from federal program

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin and in The Examiner of Streamwood

School District U-46 is seeking to have the nation's taxpayers fund a sidewalk and signage project at Elgin's Larsen Middle School.

The Board of Education approved, by a 7-0 vote, of a resolution to seek those funds from the Safe Routes to School Program, created in 2005 by the federal government, at its Monday, Oct. 4 meeting.

"The U-46 Board of Education wishes to participate... toward providing infrastructure and educational improvements within School District U-46 to promote increased walking, bicycling, and educational opportunities to our school children," the resolution states, and it calls the program "a beneficial means of improving childhood physical activity and exercise, reducing air pollution near schools, and promoting pedestrian safety measures in the vicinity of schools."

The work listed in the resolution is all at Larsen including repaving and expanding the parking lot, creating a new drive for an additional exit, new sidewalks and curb ramps, added crosswalk, new lights on the drive, striping and new parking spaces, new fencing and miscellaneous work.

The board went on to approve \$10.4 million in itemized bills as well as approval of closed session meeting minutes at its Monday, Oct. 18 meeting. The vote was 5-0, Veronica Noland and Melissa Owens were absent.

On the closed session minutes, Sue Kerr, the board's president, said: "The need for confidentiality still exists as to all or part of closed session minutes and, therefore, 'all Closed Session Minutes, with the exception of the minutes already released including audio recordings, remain confidential. In addition, all audio recordings more than 18 months old having been put into writing and approved, may be destroyed.'"

Minutes from 15 closed session meetings between March 15 and Sept. 27 of this year were approved. Audio recordings from 12 closed session meetings from Nov. 4, 2019 to March 16, 2020 were approved for destruction.

---The Examiner of Bartlett---11/3/2021

SEHS wins stormy battle, by defeating Tigers 24-13

By Seth Hancock; Note – This story also ran in The Examiner of South Elgin

The No. 2 **South Elgin football team** got the job done early to advance to the second round of the postseason after a 24-13 win over No. 31 Edwardsville on Friday, Oct. 29 at South Elgin.

The Storm, now 10-0 overall, will move on to play No. 18 Chicago Marist (7-3).

“We are fairly healthy and we are excited,” said South Elgin coach Dragan Teonic. “We were able to deal with these elements and beat a very good opponent.”

The game was scoreless after one quarter, but the Storm got rolling in the second scoring three unanswered touchdowns for a 21-0 lead at halftime. Quarterback Jake Sullivan found the end zone first on a three-yard run, and Anthony Marshall followed with a seven-yard TD run.

Jalen Jones capped the scoring in the first half with a 17- yard run in the final seconds before the break, and his run was setup by an interception from Eduardo Ramirez.

“That was huge to get the interception and then to be able to punch it in,” Teonic said.

Marshall led the Storm with 103 rushing yards and Mason Montgomery added 97 as the Storm gained 245 total yards, all on the ground. Kai Paz kicked a 28-yard field goal in the fourth quarter for their final score.

Although South Elgin led for good after the second quarter, Edwardsville did score twice in the fourth quarter.

“They took the momentum there in the fourth,” Teonic said. “We have some things we need to clean up on defense. It’s a playoff game, though, so we’ll take it. They are a good opponent, but we have a long way to go with where we want to be.”

Jordan Jones added an interception and Omari Larson forced a fumble and recovery as South Elgin won the turnover battle 3-0. Larson added two of the team’s four sacks.

---The Examiner of Bartlett---11/3/2021

Bartlett football stifled by Neuqua Valley effort

By Seth Hancock

The **Bartlett football team’s** season ended in the first round of the postseason after the No. 30 Hawks fell 60- 7 to No. 3 Neuqua Valley on Friday, Oct. 29 at Neuqua Valley.

Neuqua Valley jumped out to a 16-0 lead in the first quarter, but the Hawks scored late in the opening frame to pull to 16-7. A couple big plays helped Bartlett reach the end zone as senior quarterback Jacob Scearce threw a 37- yard pass to senior Bryce Kim, and senior James Knight followed with a 36-yard touchdown run.

However, it was all Neuqua Valley from there starting with a 23-0 second quarter for a 39-7 lead at halftime. The host then scored three unanswered touchdowns in the second half.

“They have a great team and they were the better team on the field,” said Bartlett coach Matt Erlenbaugh. “We had some adversity this year and we had some key injuries, but I’m proud of the way our guys battled. However, that defense was great. In fact, they were great in all facets against us.”

Bartlett ends the season 5-5 overall and will lose 16 seniors including Krish Agrawal, JMari White, Gabriel Bemont, Steven Callahan, Dev Rathod, Juan Villa, Dominic Harris, Bryce Johnson, Ibraheem Aburmishan, Brandon Kmiecik, Thomas Hubbard, Malachi Montijo and Alejandro Chavez.

“It’s just a great group of guys, not just good football players but also great young men,” Erlenbaugh said. “What they do for our program and what they do for the school community, I’m proud of every one of them.”

---The Examiner of Streamwood---11/3/2021

Volleyball season ends with Sabres loss to North

By Seth Hancock

The **Streamwood volleyball team’s** season ended against No. 4 St. Charles North as the No. 14 Sabres fell 25-5, 25-13 in the Streamwood Regional semifinals on Tuesday, Oct. 26.

Although Streamwood struggled to keep pace with the regional’s top seed, Sabres coach Michele Mueller was proud of her team’s effort against a tough foe.

“Overall, I thought our girls played with a lot of heart, especially Game 2,” Mueller said. “We have struggled to win this year, but our girls didn’t give up and played some great defense.”

Seniors Isabella Archulita (four kills), Jordan Rohner (three kills), Marisa Hauserman (two kills one block), Natalia Maniak (10 assists, four digs) and Alejandra Caballero Mondragon (four digs) as well as junior Kristy Nguyen (four digs) led the effort.

Streamwood ends the season 6-28 overall and will also lose seniors Faith Wende, Emma Sales and Trista Skelnik.

“Our girls this year really brought our program together,” Mueller said. “They did an excellent job leading our younger girls and showing what good sportsmanship, dedication and being a good teammate should be. On the court, they never gave up and fought for every point. For next year we have a few juniors returning to our varsity squad. We are looking for some more offensive options, and continue to work on our defense.”