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‘Spring into Summer’ Festival attracts hundreds to learn more about free Summer Meals

Rochester families enjoy a day of food and fun at Frontier Field

ROCHESTER – A child in the City of Rochester was able to eat a free meal more than 368,000 times last summer.

As impressive as that sounds, city leaders and local anti-hunger advocates agree that the numbers can and should be higher.

In a continued effort to spread the word about the City of Rochester’s Summer Meals program, the Summer Meals Partnership of Rochester hosted its annual “Spring into Summer” festival Saturday at Frontier Field. Despite some early-morning showers, more than 300 people came out to attend the event that featured many kid-friendly games and activities and connected parents with resources and other programs available to city residents. Most importantly, it provided a preview of the Summer Meals program through a preliminary list of host sites, and with tastings of various menu items.

“As the end of the school year approaches, we’re here to remind Rochester parents that kids have access to free, healthy meals all summer long,” said Dina Faticone, Director of Community Health and Engagement at Common Ground Health. “Saturday’s festival is an important kickoff event for us to make parents aware of the Summer Meals program, and provide a fun day at the ballpark for hundreds of kids.”

Buffalo Bills great Thurman Thomas also came out to support the event, and spoke with fans and took pictures at the American Dairy Association’s exhibit table. The Bills recently announced they would retire the running back’s No. 34 next season.

The Summer Meals Partnership of Rochester comprises many local organizations committed to ensuring that all children 18 years and younger have access to healthy meals while school is not

in session. Local R-Centers, summer school locations and other community sites host the program. Foodlink and the Rochester City School district serve as vendors and sponsors for the partnership, along with the City of Rochester, Common Ground Health and the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

“We know that the summer months are an incredible burden on many parents once school meals are no longer accessible,” said Simeon Bannister, Interim Vice President of Community Programs for RACF. “The Summer Meals Partnership of Rochester bridges that gap for parents to make sure our children can have a happy and healthy summer without having to worry about when, and from where they’ll get their next meal.”

Last year’s Summer Meals program resulted in a total of 368,452 meals served – with an average daily participation rate of more than 5,500 children. The program benefitted from 111 community partners that acted as host sites, including several that welcomed the Summer Meals on Wheels vehicle for its first full summer of operation.

This vehicle, which visits neighborhoods that lack a nearby Summer Meals sites, travels to places such as libraries, parks and playgrounds to distribute more meals throughout the summer. Foodlink secured funding for a new vehicle through the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation and RACF, which will allow for the expansion of the program. Foodlink also received support from the Joy in Childhood Foundation, and funding from the United Way of Wayne County that will allow Foodlink to pilot additional sites outside of Rochester for the first time.

“We’re excited to partner with a few new Wayne County sites and expand our footprint with this vital program,” said Terra Keller, Foodlink’s Chief Operating Officer. “Building healthy communities begins by making sure our youngest residents have access to healthy meals and we’re grateful to all of the community partners that have stepped up to support the Summer Meals program’s growth this year.”

The Summer Meals program begins on June 25. For more information about the partnership or a list of 2018 Summer Meals sites, visit www.summermealsroc.org or dial 2-1-1.

About The Summer Meals Partnership of Rochester

The Summer Meals Partnership is collaboration among the City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, Foodlink, the Rochester Area Community Foundation, Common Ground Health and other community partners. The partnership leads year-round efforts to plan, promote, and continuously improve the Rochester Summer Meals experience. The primary purpose of the Summer Meals Partnership is to ensure that every child in the City of Rochester has access to free and healthy summer meals.