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Chef program spices up school lunches

By John Gunner Gooch
Gazette Staff

NEW BUFFALO — Jim Frye, who owns the popular Jimmy's Bar & Grill on

LaPorte Road with his wife Tracy, looked right at home in the kitchen of the New Buffalo High School/Middle School cafeteria as he demonstrated his culinary skills for the staff

there by cooking up a couple of large pots of his cheeseburger soup while imparting some tips and sharing some of the secret ingredients he uses to get it just right.

"It's a good way for those involved in the food service and hospitality business that's such an important part of what Harbor Country is all about, to give back to the community that gives us so much support."

--Jim Frye, owner of Jimmy's Bar & Grill

LEFT: Jim Frye of Jimmy's Bar & Grill (L to R) gave Maria Maroney and other kitchen staffers at New Buffalo Middle/High School some tips on how to make his signature Cheeseburger Soup for a special lunchtime treat. Gooch Photo

The affable and knowledgeable Frye had the honor of being the first local chef to participate in the New Buffalo Area Schools Food Service Department's unique Visiting Chef program that invites some of the area's best cooks to visit the school and introduce some new flavors and trends, give some guidance on ethnic menus, and help develop some new recipes there that stay within the national recommendations for school meals, the school budget, and the timing of student meals.

"I think this program is a great idea, and it's a good way for those involved in the food service and hospitality business that's such an important part of what Harbor Country is all about, to give back to the community that gives us so much support," Frye says as he writes down the recipe for one of his signature soups so the school's kitchen staff can offer it again.

"My time here has also been a learning experience for me," Frye adds. "I've learned how

different and regulated food preparation is in an environment like this where certain specific guidelines have to be followed every day. Here they have to prepare food in enough quantities to be able to feed hundreds of hungry students in a short period of time, and that's pretty impressive. You don't have quite the time or freedom here that we have when we're cooking in the kitchen at Jimmy's."

As a final touch Frye recommends garnishing the bowls of soup with a little shredded cheese and lettuce to add some color and dress it up a little bit before it's served, and then he has the pleasure of ladling out his tasty creation to a steady stream of students who are appreciative of his efforts and give him rave reviews.

"I know other chefs in the area will also be coming in here to participate in this program, so hopefully it's something that will keep going and growing from this point on," Frye says.

