

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Lew Muckle Elementary, A Passionate Chef Teaches Children How To Cook

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ST. CROIX -- It was a sight made for happy stories. Chef Jamal Miranda, an experienced and ubiquitous cook here, engaging Lew Muckle Elementary School children as he taught them how to cook, in this case, veggie quesadilla. Above, Mr. Miranda hands a plate of quesadillas to children.

Mr. Miranda was invited by the school as part of its health and wellness program, which aims to educate students on the importance of healthy eating. But if the children learned anything on Saturday morning -- and they did -- it was because of Mr. Miranda's ability to capture their attention for well over an hour, as he mixed learning with a fun presentation, animating his [already passionate personality](#) with an infusion of jokes, dancing and other

engaging expressions.

"Anything for the kids," Mr. Miranda told The Consortium in an interview following the cooking session.

Mr. Miranda hosts teaching classes regularly, albeit in a different setting with adults. However, he told The Consortium yesterday that he intends to do more cooking classes in the schools, and recalled his own training at the junior high level.

[Lew Muckle Elementary School](#)

"Our island doesn't have that many chefs right now, but we can start now from young and continue training them through junior high -- which is where I started," Mr. Miranda said, recalling his years at John H. Woodson Junior High School.

He spoke of the experience he gained while working at multiple restaurants here, including Rum Runners in Christiansted, where Mr. Miranda was taught many of his skills; La Reine Chicken Shack, starting the dinner menu there, and as a supervisor at the Renaissance St. Croix Carambola Beach Resort & Spa.

"I left La Reine Chicken Shack and opened my own restaurant," Mr. Miranda said. The chef also revealed that he would soon be opening a second restaurant in Sion Farm, across from Plaza Extra East.

In relation to healthy eating, Mr. Miranda said it was sad to see children who are obese, and saw his role yesterday as one that could inspire the children in encouraging their parents to prepare healthier offerings, or even do the cooking themselves.



"Preparing the meals in front of the children is very exciting to them," Mr. Miranda said. "They might not like it, but if they see when it's being prepared, that makes all the difference. It gets them excited and loud, and today, they're eating vegetables," he added, motioning to the children enjoying the veggie quesadillas.

"They don't like vegetables, but they just ate vegetables," Mr. Miranda added.

The school's Health and Wellness Committee, in a press release issued to The Consortium on Saturday morning, said it recognizes that kids of all ages are interested in cooking and that there are many benefits to getting them involved at an early age.

"The whole idea behind this was really to get students and parents involved in healthy eating and to broaden their palate," said Amanda Burton, a teacher who also does PR work for the school. "We find that students are coming in eating Cheetos, high syrup and high fat content foods, so we really want to promote eating fruits and vegetables, or homegrown foods in their diet."

The committee listed the following benefits:

1. **Broaden the palate:** Cooking together is a fun and low-pressure way to expose kids to new and healthier foods.
2. **Building Math Skills:** Following a recipe means learning how to measure accurately, and it illustrates fractions in a practical way. Doubling a recipe includes multiplication and/or addition.
3. **Comprehension:** Reading and understanding step-by-step directions, adding ingredients in sequence, and techniques such as folding and blending, are all important components to yielding the finished food product.
4. **Real Life Science:** Cooking is a science experiment. Too much salt, baking powder, not enough flour, or the wrong timing and you're likely to have a flop on your hands. Cooking provides an opportunity for kids to get hands-on experience with basic science.
5. **Communication:** A relaxed atmosphere in the kitchen offers an opportunity to talk, about anything! Parents can take advantage of this, especially with teens, as communication is a key element to raising a well-adjusted, healthy child.
6. **Self-Esteem:** Cooking along with parents allows kids to get instant feedback, which helps them learn and grow in self-knowledge.

Cooking was also noted as being a life skill and fun. The event was the first of an annual effort that included students Kindergarten through 6 grade.

Image Credit: VIC.