

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Chautauqua County Taking Steps to Be Proactive In Dealing with Food-Borne Illnesses

Executive Greg Edwards said new program will help achieve their goals

Mayville: -- E. coli and salmonella sicken hundreds of U.S. residents each year. According to a report published March 3, 2010 by the Produce Safety Project, food-borne illnesses cost the United States \$152 billion annually in health care and other losses. An estimated 76 million people each year are sickened by food-borne illness, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized and about 5,000 die.

With these disheartening figures in mind, the Chautauqua County Health Department has partnered with the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) to offer a Certified Professional Food Handler training program to the approximate 600 food service establishments in Chautauqua County.

Chautauqua County Executive Gregory J. Edwards is in full support of the training program, and said all food service establishments in the county are required to participate and have at least one employee trained.

"To have a member of your staff trained as a Certified Professional Food Handler is absolutely critical," Edwards said. "The number of residents who were stricken by a food-borne illness last year is unacceptable. Having a trained food handler working in every restaurant in the County will help reduce the number of cases significantly."

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) the majority of food-borne illnesses in the United States are attributed to public eating establishments. This training program is designed to maintain quality food service establishments with basic principals of safe food handling and:

- Safeguard the health of customers and employees
- Protect the public image and reputation of establishments
- Reduce the risk of lawsuits and high insurance premiums at an establishment
- Allow confidence of knowing employees consistently prepare and serve food in a safe and sanitary manner
- Improve an establishment

Chautauqua County Public Health Director Christine Schuyler said many chain restaurants in the county already have one or more employees certified in a course that deals directly with handling food, and research shows that these restaurants have fewer critical violations.

"This initiative follows with our need to change our focus to disease prevention and being proactive versus reactive," Schuyler stated. "We are proactively helping food handlers to improve their practices, which will improve health, business and marketability, as well as decrease business owner and taxpayer costs related to Sanitary Code violations and re-inspections."

The Certified Professional Food Handler training is a three (3) hour workshop which assists local food service establishments to meet New York State and Chautauqua County Sanitary Code requirements of having at least one certified employee on record. The workshop includes power point presentations, discussion of key points and a 12 question open book exam.

"What's also important to note is that certification is valid for a three year period," Edwards pointed out. "Brochures, which include a registration form, have been mailed to food service establishments within Chautauqua County inviting them to attend a workshop.

Edwards said that establishments are only required to send one employee to be certified but are encouraged to send additional employees to be certified. The County Executive said he is also aware of the cost involved with sending an employee to these workshops.

"I am happy to announce that I have reduced the course tuition from \$75.00 for the first person to \$25.00 and from \$35.00 for each additional person from your business to \$15.00," Edwards said. "Additionally, Not-for-Profit establishments will only pay \$10.00 for the first attendee and \$5.00 for each additional person. We are also offering the course for \$10 to individuals who are not currently employed in the food service industry, but would like to have the certification on their resume."

Schuyler said that many food service establishments in Chautauqua County have already signed up for the workshops. In fact, the first workshop, which is scheduled to be held at the Harvest Chapel Methodist Church in Fredonia on March 16, has been filled to capacity.

"The response to this course has been positive, as evidenced by the current registration of over 40 people for the March class," Schuyler said.

A second workshop will be held on Tuesday, April 27th, from 8:30am – 12:00pm at the South County Office Building, 110 East Fourth Street Jamestown. Additional workshops will be announced.

For more information on the Certified Professional Food Handler training program, including a registration form, please visit the Health Department's internet site at www.co.chautauqua.ny.us or contact (716) 753-4481.

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