

New food trucks will have a special purpose



By Michele Roberts The Sun Journal

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In recent years, food trucks have become extremely popular and trendy. Serving everything from tacos to ethnic dishes to old fashioned meat and three vegetable plates, food trucks cater to practically every craving known to human beings. In eastern North Carolina, food trucks aren't necessarily a common sight. But thanks to a partnership between Easterseals UCP and Trillium Health Resources, two food trucks are coming to the area that have a very special purpose. A ribbon-cutting was held Monday, September 30 at Easterseals UCP's Trent Road location to welcome one of the food trucks to New Bern.

"It's hard to express how excited we are to finally see this project come to fruition," said Jennifer Mackethan, Communications and Marketing Director for Trillium Health Resources.

"We have partnered with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina and the Food Bank of the Albemarle to bring healthy and fresh food options to places where food deserts and food swamps are a big problem. The trucks are also going to provide valuable job training to individuals that really need it."

Food deserts are those neighborhoods that lack grocery stores and have very limited access to fresh foods. Food swamps are areas in which the only food sources readily available are fast-food restaurants and/or convenience stores. Both scenarios are common in urban areas with lack of transportation and rural areas where it can be miles to the nearest town. And areas that fall into those categories can be found all over eastern North Carolina.

Healthy food options and employment of individuals with disabilities are two of the five ways that Medicaid uses for "Social Determinants of Health", or ways to gauge the overall health of a community. According to a press release, the trucks, operated by Easterseals UCP and funded by Trillium, will be operational in New <https://www.newbernsj.com/news/20191002/new-food-trucks-will-have-special-purpose>

Bern and Ahoskie to create skill-building and work experience in a natural community setting for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities that are served by Easterseals UCP. Employing and training adults with I/DD on the food trucks will show how capable those clients are both to the community at large as well as the hospitality industry. Individuals between the ages of 16 and 26 will be hired to work on the trucks.

"Our purpose at Easterseals UCP is to provide meaningful and exceptional services so that people living with disability and mental health challenges learn to live, work and play in their community," said Luanne Welch, CEO of Easterseals UCP. "And Trillium's commitment to sensABLE snacks represents so much more than a food truck or healthy snacks. It's a vehicle to employment, personal growth and community engagement. A good partnership takes a common purpose, willing resource sharing and mission-based collaboration and that's exactly what we are celebrating today at this ribbon cutting."

The trucks were created in Charlotte at Biz on Wheels over a span of about 90 days, said Biz on Wheels owner and operator Ron Yeller.

"I thought this project was a lot of fun but it was also very interesting," he said. "I've worked on a lot of mobile businesses but this was a unique situation, in that the trucks were to be identical. They are also more of a mobile storefront than a typical food truck because there won't be any cooking done inside. I'm glad we were able to participate in this venture and I really hope that these trucks are going to be successful for them."

Kevin Roberts, President of the New Bern Chamber of Commerce, was on hand for the ribbon-cutting and said that arrival of the food truck is good news for the city.

"We've had a lot of ribbon cuttings in the market in the past few months and that's always good news for the city," Roberts said. "We're grateful that so many businesses have chosen to make New Bern their home. And in this case, putting people to work and getting people to focus on healthy eating at the same time is such a great thing to accomplish. I'm so pleased that this truck is part of our market."

Talks are underway with various organizations and officials hope the food truck will soon be making appearances at football games, fairs and festivals in the area, Mackethan said. The truck will have a variety of pre-packaged snacks and healthy treats for sale including bottled water, soft drinks, juices, milk and coffee as well as baked goods such as muffins, cookies, granola bars and yogurt cups. Uncut fresh fruit will also be available. For more information on the food truck and where it be found, like and follow the "sensABLE snacks" Facebook page.

You can also visit www.eastersealsucp.com/sensablesnacks to learn more.