Summer Lunch Expands to Include Suppers for Teens
Alex Barrett and Emma Johnson, Forest Foundation Interns, contributed to this article.

Although the thermometer read 92 degrees on the first full day of school vacation, The Open Door team was ready to help local kids beat the heat with cool treats, freshly grilled food, and lots of games and prizes at the annual Riverdale Park Summer Meals Kick-Off Picnic—a sure signal that summer had arrived.

At the picnic, children enjoyed face painting, an inflatable obstacle course, a sprinkler, the Good Food Farm, and a demonstration by Gloucester Police Department’s K-9 unit. DJ Johnny K rocked the house with music and entertainment including musical chairs and a conga line. After working up an appetite, families came together to enjoy a lunch of burgers, hot dogs, watermelon and carrot sticks, followed by an ice cream sundae bar.

Strong community was evident at the picnic that drew neighborhood children, parents, grandparents, volunteers, and even a few local celebrities. Gloucester’s new Chief of Police, Leonard Campanello was on hand to flip burgers, while Mayor Carolyn Kirk chatted with locals and joined the children to watch the K-9 presentation.

Chief Campanello commended the event’s “collaborative spirit,” calling it “fantastic.” Mayor Kirk, who has two children in the Gloucester Public Schools, said kids “need a lot of support in what can be an unstructured time of year.” The picnic, she continued, is “just a nice segue to summer. It gets the kids in a new routine.”

This is the second summer teens have the opportunity to visit one of two drop-in centers where they not only can spend time with friends after work, but also get a nutritious supper. This expansion has prompted The Open Door to transition from its former title of Summer Lunch to the new title of Summer Meals program.

“Busy teens don’t always have time for lunch during the summer,” said Jen Perry, Director of Distribution and Nutrition at The Open Door. “We decided the best way to reach teens was to go to their favorite community spots. By offering a dinner meal at teen drop-in centers, we are able to feed more of our hungry youth.”

Thanks to continuing partnerships with Gloucester School Food Service, Rockport and Gloucester Housing Authorities, the Cape Ann YMCA, and Project Bread, this is the twelfth consecutive summer that The Open Door has sponsored summer meal sites in Gloucester and Rockport. A full schedule of meal sites can be found at FOODPANTRY.org.
Before they head home for the afternoon each day, children at Veterans’ Memorial Elementary School in Gloucester have the option of fueling up with PowerSnack, an after-school supper program offered by The Open Door in partnership with Gloucester Public Schools.

The hearty snack includes an entree paired with fresh fruit and vegetable choices selected by the child from a student-sized salad bar.

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