

HEAL NH's healthy menu program takes off

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ASHLAND — With a population of about 2,000 people and covering less than 12 square miles, Ashland, is a small town making some big changes.

Over the past year, HEAL NH has worked with Ashland town officials, as well as community members, to support several projects designed to provide residents with more healthy eating choices and opportunities to get out and be physically active.

In April alone, Ashland launched two healthy eating, active living projects.

On April 19, Ashland launched an organic community garden and more than 50 people showed up at the ribbon cutting ceremony. A day earlier, Dot's Bread & Butter joined The Common Man Restaurant— two Main Street eating establishments in Ashland — to offer healthy menu items to their customers.

As part of the program, Dot's Bread & Butter and The Common Man worked with a registered dietitian at Spere Memorial Hospital in Plymouth to modify and/or add several menu items to meet healthier standards, including lower fat and sodium content.

The program also requires that the HEAL approved menu items be clearly marked.

These local restaurants do not fall under the new federal menu-labeling legislation, nor does the State require them to offer healthier menu items or provide nutritional labeling, so why are they choosing to modify their menus to make them healthier?

“We believe that the sky is the limit with the positive impact this type of thinking can make,” said Joe Collins, executive chef at Dot’s Bread & Butter. “Giving opportunities for people to make healthier choices in this manner can really make a difference.”

The healthy restaurant program in Ashland is part of a growing movement with restaurants in New Hampshire and across the country responding to consumer demand for healthier menu items.

While there were only four participants in HEAL NH's statewide healthy restaurant initiative about a year ago, participation has tripled in the past few months, with more in the process to join.

The Common Man and Dot's Bread & Butter are two of the most recent restaurants to participate illustrating how members of a community can unite to make impactful changes.

“The Common Man Family is proud to not only support but also partner with HEAL in efforts to bring health-conscious options and practices to the Ashland Community,” said Jason Lyon, CEO of the Common Man Family. “Our HEAL children's menu has been very well received, and we plan to offer a new summer menu with more great healthy options for our guests.”