



**Ontario Home Economics Association**

*Ask a Professional Home Economist*

**For Immediate Release**

## **Family Matters ~ Families Matter**

by Mary Carver, P.H.Ec.

Professional Home Economists from across Ontario gathered in Ottawa on May 24, 2008 to discuss 'family issues' as well as the fact that 'families matter to society' at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting & Conference of the Ontario Home Economics Association.

Keynote speaker **Clarence Lochhead**, Executive Director of the Vanier Institute of the Family, opened the conference with the statement, "Family Challenges are Our Challenges". Lochhead expressed concern for Canadian families who face the ever-increasing time crunch, fewer annual savings, food security issues and growing environmental responsibilities. "While Canadians are asked to use public transportation and to drive smaller cars, change is sometimes difficult due to family size and commuting distances. Escalating fuel costs influence food, clothing and shelter prices. As incomes have risen, so too has spending - Canadians are currently saving next to nothing and facing growing debt levels," said Lochhead.

**Amy Snider, P.H.Ec.** of Dana McCauley & Associates Ltd., Toronto, presented "Topline Food Trends for Canadian Families" - mainly new food products available or soon-to-be-available in grocery stores. New products can influence buying habits without a guarantee of quality. While many top trends are well-designed and useful, others are non-essential and expensive for families. But then, tomato paste available in a tube does sound convenient and could reduce waste, as Snider pointed out. It appears that consumers often want to eat on the run; therefore, food portability is a huge trend. Is that perhaps why some passenger cars are designed with as many as 18 cup holders? Foods enhanced with added nutritional benefits are swarming the markets. For example, prebiotics (compounds usually high in fibre that claim to feed probiotic bacteria in the colon) and probiotics, which claim to help maintain the digestive system by providing a regular source of "friendly" bacteria to the intestinal tract, are trending up in many foods.

**Brenda Watson, P.Ag.**, Executive Director of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education (an organization to which OHEA belongs), brought greetings and reminded of the upcoming CPCFSE Annual General Meeting on June 3 at Algonquin College, Ottawa. The four key food safety messages which the Partnership communicates to consumers are: CLEAN: Wash hands and surfaces often; CHILL: Refrigerate promptly; COOK: Cook to proper temperatures; and SEPARATE: Don't cross-contaminate. "FightBAC!®" is currently used by CPCFSE and will continue to be used for specific target audiences, while a soon-to-be-launched *Be Food Safe* theme will build on the "FightBAC!®" campaign.

**Mary Johnston, P.H.Ec.**, Manager, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Team, Division of Childhood & Adolescence, Public Health Agency of Canada, spoke to delegates about the causes and symptoms of FASD. When a woman drinks alcohol while she is pregnant, the alcohol goes to the baby through her bloodstream and can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, a serious condition that can affect a child throughout life. Children with FASD have problems with physical development, learning, behaviour and social skills. “Abstinence should be recommended to all women during pregnancy to prevent this devastating disorder which can have a wide range of serious disabilities,” explained Johnston. The risks of FASD need to be well communicated.

**Mary Bush**, former Director General, Nutrition Policy Division, Health Canada, addressed the topic of “Canada’s Food Guide and Obesity Prevention - Complex Issues”. Bush explained that over three years of widespread consultations were held to create the best possible nutrition policy for Canadians. To ensure the important nutrition information reaches our diverse Canadian population, Canada’s Food Guide is now available in ten additional languages including Arabic, Chinese, Farsi (Persian), Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil and Urdu. Most alarming is the fact that some children today are facing weight challenges where their lifespan may be shorter than their parents. Obesity is an international problem and a very complex issue in which changes in the environment affecting both physical activity and the amount and type of food available all play a role.

Award-winning cookbook author **Margaret Dickenson, P.H.Ec.** and her husband Larry, former Ambassador to Indonesia, hosted an outstanding house tour and reception following the conference. Their beautiful home along the scenic Rideau Canal is filled with art from around the world collected over a 20-year period when the couple lived in eight different countries as ambassadors for Canada. The reception was held in support of the OHEA Public Education Campaign, an ongoing program which includes the writing and dissemination of peer-reviewed media releases related to home and family life.

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**Mary Carver** is an Ottawa-based Professional Home Economist and serves as the Public Relations Coordinator for the Ontario Home Economics Association.

*The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.*

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