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For Lapin, healthy living starts in the kitchen

By RUSTY GRAHAM

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Carol Lapin loves to cook.

And not just cook, but cook healthy, nutritious meals.

As a licensed nutritionist and registered dietician, she loves to show others how to cook, especially how to cook familiar dishes with more nutritious ingredients.

She plans to open an office the Town and Country Professional Building, on Town and Country Way just west of the ball fields at Memorial Middle School, complete with a working kitchen to teach clients how to prepare healthy meals. Those clients include gynecological referrals, breast cancer patients, bariatric surgery patients and children.

"The office will have a homey feel, not that clinical feel," Lapin said. "I'm going to transfer the feel of my home kitchen to the office."

She talks while she works in her Bunker Hill kitchen, busily preparing a healthy meal for a small gathering of friends she's hosting later that day.

It's a pasta and vegetable combination that sizzles in the background as Lapin tosses salad at the counter. She's already put chips cut from whole-grain tortillas in the oven to toast while the rest of the meal is prepared.

"You can make your own tortilla chips, you know," says Lapin. "It's really easy to do, and much healthier than what you buy at the store."

But back to the office.

She said that most dieticians and nutritionist visit with clients in an office, over a desk. They discuss what the client needs to know, give over a few handouts and send the client on her way.

"In my place of business, clients will have the opportunity to receive information using all their senses," she said. "They will hear, see, taste, smell, and feel good food and it will be fun.

"I want people to take control of how they fuel their body and pick up less 'fast food' and dine out less."



Carol Lapin prepares a nutritious pasta dish in her home kitchen.

Clients entering Lapin's office will scarcely realize they're in a clinical setting, she said, and that's absolutely by design.

"When you walk through the (office) door you will be in the family room with the kitchen visible — home sweet home," she said. "I'm not a contemporary girl so it'll be 'down home'."

Lapin said the at-home feeling is especially inviting for the kids and her cancer patients.

Better food, better health

She says there's a place for nutritionists in the health process.

"Doctors diagnose and prescribe medication, but nutrition is important," Lapin said. "There's a need for dieticians."

She also spreads the nutrition word by giving group presentations ("I love groups," she says, with emphasis on the love) in corporate and other settings. The new office will be large enough to accommodate group presentations.

She led a class last fall on preparing healthy meals at Spring Branch ISD's Parent U, a class that was so popular that people had to be turned away.

"Parent U was tremendous. I was happy that group was there," she said, referring to the large group of Hispanic parents who attended the session.

"Hispanics are at a real risk for cardiovascular disease. It's a cultural thing. And the lower you go on the socio-economic scale, the more at risk you are."

And for kids, she says, the message is inconsistent.

"You talk about nutrition in schools, then the school turns around and has a bake sale," she said.

Lapin knows of what she speaks. With an alphabet soup of credentials following her name — MS, CSSD, RD, LD — she is equipped to speak and act authoritatively on healthy eating.

And as a lifelong athlete, with an undergraduate degree in physical education, she lives what preaches.

A mid-distance runner, Lapin (nee Sheffield) was one of the first two women to receive track scholarships to the University of Texas at Austin. (The other, Susan Abernathy Murphy, remains Lapin's best friend).

Lapin was staff dietician with the Houston Astros for 10 years, and was an adjunct professor in nutrition and exercise at Texas Women's University.

For more information, visit www.cslnutritionalservices.com.