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MAKING THE MOST OF

Monday



Through social media savvy and community outreach,
the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion
helps us take better care of ourselves

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GENIUS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE COMPLICATED. IN 2003, Sid Lerner '53 took two simple truths, combined them, and dreamed up Meatless Monday, a public health campaign now having a huge impact around the globe.

Truth No. 1: "If advertising can get you to buy junk, it can help you make good decisions, too," Lerner says. He should know. Lerner ran with the original pack of "Mad Men" and directed the creative team that developed the "Don't Squeeze the Charmin" advertising campaign.

Truth No. 2: Americans eat too much meat, and this is causing increases in diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic, preventable diseases. This, too, Lerner knows from personal experience. He says he started working on the Meatless Monday concept after a doctor told him his cholesterol and blood pressure were too high, and that his diet was the reason why.

The Meatless Monday campaign uses cyclical messaging to make people aware of healthier dining options. Eschewing dogma, the campaign offers helpful reminders and tips, prompting people to consider healthy choices. Lerner also rejects top-down approaches to social marketing. By encouraging and supporting people to start their own Meatless Mon-

day campaigns, the movement has grown to more than 20 countries, attracting the attention of *The New York Times* and other major media outlets. It has been adopted by food giant Sodexo and championed by media mogul Oprah Winfrey, music magnate Russell Simmons, celebrity chef Mario Batali, and Beatles icon Paul McCartney. It has also spawned a host of related efforts—collectively known as the Monday Campaigns—including The Kids Cook Monday, Quit & Stay Quit Monday, and Move It Monday.

Connecting the campaigns to expert knowledge has been a top priority for Lerner since the beginning. He started building university alliances in 2003, when the Monday Campaigns turned to the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University for guidance on health issues. Soon after, the campaigns started working with Newhouse School professor Fiona Chew, an expert in public health messaging. The Monday Campaigns also partner with the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. "Why would anyone listen to me about health simply because I can turn a phrase?" Lerner asks. "It was the public health experts at Johns Hopkins who told me that Americans eat about 15 percent too much meat—about an extra

day's worth of consumption a week. And it was the intrepid Professor Chew at Syracuse who, with a minimal budget, first started to roll out Healthy Monday programming in a campus setting."

Lerner Center Established

That instinct of turning to top university programs for guidance led Lerner to his biggest investment in higher education yet: the establishment of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at the Maxwell School last summer. Since then, the center has hired two administrators, launched a search for an endowed faculty chair, created campus partnerships with Food Services and Recreation Services, and put a cadre of students in the Master of Public Health (MPH) program, known as Lerner Fellows, to

help make people aware of the offerings.

Of the work done so far, Professor Tom Dennison '74, the center's director, is most proud of the efforts to engage the community about its health needs and priorities. Under Dennison's guidance, MPH student Kelsey Palladino '10 researched the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the comprehensive health care legislation President Obama signed in 2010, focusing on the requirement that all nonprofit hospitals conduct community health needs assessments. Dennison then collaborated with Maxwell professor Tina Nabatchi of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration to train 35 MPH students to host the community forums. The students held five forums, engaging dozens of health professionals and community members. An initial report identified three broad areas of focus: social issues, such as the economy and the availability of healthy food options; access to care; and chronic diseases caused by substance abuse, poor nutrition, and lack of physical exercise.

Dennison believes such engagement has tremendous value. "There is no shortage of issues we, as health professionals, could identify to focus on," he says. "It is enormously helpful, then, to simply ask people, individually and collectively, about their priorities. That's the beauty of the Chancellor's vision of Scholarship in Action. We're using the University's resources to help the community accomplish what it wants to accomplish."

The outreach is happening in other ways, too. The center worked with the SU student-run public relations firm Hill Communications to survey students about health priorities, the obstacles students face in meeting those goals, and ideas to bridge the gap. It has built evaluation into most of its programs, utilizing surveys and other tools to gather meaningful feedback. The center has also sparked conversations about health on its burgeoning media platforms. It profiles healthy community members at healthymonday.syr.edu, offers encouragement to those looking for motivation on Twitter and Facebook, highlights healthy spots—such as campus gyms and Meatless Monday participating restaurants—on foursquare, and works to draw others into the discussion.

Community members now take to the Facebook page to promote healthy events of their own, and students enthusiastically retweet the center's @HealthyCuse tweets, such as a recent one announcing that popular fitness classes will be free, courtesy of Healthy Monday. Information studies graduate student Gwyneth Frey, for instance, tweeted: "@HealthyCuse yes! Love power hour! Donna [Acox, the instructor] is awesome. Seriously challenging, fun, and makes the most out of a 50 min workout."

A key goal for the center is to determine whether these kinds of engagements, prompts, reminders, and motivators make a difference, says Lerner Center program director Rebecca Bostwick G'04. If they do work, the center wants to know how and why. What types of messages are most effective? How and when are they best delivered? And, most importantly, what might all this suggest for public health campaigns?

Amplifying Awareness

That's a serious question in a country where, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), seven of 10 deaths result from chronic diseases, many of which could be prevented. A third of adults and 20 percent of children are obese. Less than 22 percent of high school students eat five or more servings of fruits



Rebecca Bostwick G'04 and Professor Tom Dennison '74 guide the efforts of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion.

work conducting research and managing an aggressive social media marketing campaign. The center has developed such popular campus health programs as free fitness classes on Monday, an ethics of eating seminar (co-sponsored by Hendricks Chapel), and fruit deliveries to various locations on campus. The center has also introduced Monday programming to the broader Syracuse community. It is developing a refugee nutrition program with Hopeprint, a local nonprofit organization. It's working with both SUNY Upstate Medical University and Say Yes to Education to establish additional Monday campaigns. And it has recruited local restaurants to the Meatless Monday movement. The restaurants feature vegetarian options on Mondays, and the center uses its social media platforms on Twitter, Facebook, and foursquare to



On the Web

lernercenter.syr.edu:

The digital home of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at the Maxwell School

healthymonday.syr.edu:

The Monday Campaigns in Syracuse

mondaycampaigns.org:

News and resources about all the Monday Campaigns, including Meatless Monday

Merging Social Marketing and Science

The mission of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion is to apply the best practices of social marketing and science to create public health programs that are motivating and sustainable. The center is a laboratory for the development of strategies that can be replicated in community and national prevention programs. The center works in partnership with citizens, students, researchers, and public health professionals to identify needs, develop programming, and deploy collaborative initiatives.



Vegan Spanish rice and bean tacos are among the variety of meatless options for students dining in the cafeteria at Ernie Davis Hall.

and vegetables per day. More than 43 million Americans smoke. As the CDC puts it: “Four modifiable health risk behaviors—lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and excessive alcohol consumption—are responsible for much of the illness, suffering, and early death related to chronic diseases.”

Educational and awareness campaigns can make a difference, as established by such efforts as the Designated Driver program. In fact, Meatless Monday can be traced all the way back to Herbert Hoover, according to Lerner. While serving as the head of the U.S. Food Administration, Hoover came up with the idea as a way of conserving meat during World War I. “It worked for conservation, so why not health?” Lerner says of his inspiration. “And I liked the alliteration. Then it turns out Monday is a real zinger of a day, a day with a lot of power.” Lerner is referring to a Johns Hopkins study that found people are more apt to make changes on Mondays, and more likely to stick with those changes. Monday, it turns out, is an agenda setting day, “the January of the week,” Lerner says.

Bostwick thinks the engagement approach the center uses to spread the Monday Campaigns in Syracuse may increase the effect even more. “The literature shows that when you partner with people, particularly with community and opinion leaders, the effect of a health campaign can be amplified,” she says.

It’s abundantly clear the Monday Campaign teams at SU, in Lerner’s New York City offices, and elsewhere are getting the word out. According to a recent survey, name recognition of Meatless Monday in the United States is around 50 percent. *The New York Times* recently mentioned it as a likely factor in a decline in meat consumption. The webzine *Salon* called Meatless Monday “utterly doable, utterly sane,” and the National Consumer Research Institute attributed the effort to the rise of “flexitarianism,” a movement toward a consciously leaner diet without the rigidity of vegetarianism.

In Syracuse, Lerner Center promotional efforts, which began in October, have already produced nearly a dozen articles and TV news spots touting the approach. Nationally, an army of bloggers, food writers, and chefs is producing a never-ending cascade of messaging aimed at motivating people and giving them helpful information. Some are associated with Lerner and some are not, since none of the Monday materials are trademarked. “Sid is a social marketing pioneer,” Dennison says. “He was really ahead of the curve with Meatless Monday, marrying the power of cyclical messaging to the reduction of chronic, preventable disease and using a social, networked, grassroots approach to pushing the idea out into the community. His timing and execution were just right, and I think that’s why we are really seeing this explode.” ◀◀