

Food handling classes protect community health

It's 9:10 a.m. on a weekday morning. Jennine Wolf of Washington County Environmental Health Department is in the Highland High School Family and Consumer Science room. It's test day.

Wolf isn't there to do a food inspection or perform other duties of her job as a public health inspector. She's there to test the students.

For the past two weeks, Wolf has been teaching 12 juniors and seniors about safe food handling practices. Wolf is using ServSafe, a curriculum developed by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. She has taught her students about proper hand washing techniques, sanitizing procedures, proper food temperatures and countless other issues they may encounter in the food industry.

"A large percentage of these young people will, at some time in their lives, work in food-related jobs," Wolf said. "Some now have part-time jobs in fast food establishments. Many will pay college expenses working in restaurants."

Others in Wolf's classes may choose a career in child care, geriatric care, medicine or veterinary medicine. Most will become caregivers of young children or elderly parents. All will take care of themselves.

The students seem to understand the value of learning about food safety. "Ms. Wolf showed us the dangers in our lives without scaring us," one student remarked. "She showed us how we can control the emerging food hazards around us."

Wolf's work has been funded for the past four years by grants administered through the Office of Local Board of Health Assistance at the Iowa Department of Public Health. Besides providing ServSafe training to high school students, Wolf also targets non-profit organizations which are not required to be licensed to serve food.

"The grants have played a crucial part in our success," Wolf said. "Non-profits and schools do not



Jennine Wolf talks about food handling safety to the Gourmet Food students at Washington High School in Washington. During this class, Wolf focused on Microbiology, the second chapter of the ServSafe book.

have the funding to allow people to attend a ServSafe class, which costs between \$100.00 and \$125.00 per person."

Laurie Bauer of the local Y's Men food group, which serves about 2,300 pork sandwiches at the county fair each year, explains that the ServSafe classes have made a lasting impression for her organization. One day, she recounts, Wolf and her boss made a surprise visit to their stand. Not knowing Wolf's supervisor, one of the workers asked if he was there to volunteer. Wolf's boss, as a joke, said he was. The first words out of the worker's mouth were "then you need to wash your hands."

Recently, Wolf has expanded her program to include educating child care workers. Kathy Spenner, who has operated a home child care for 20 years, commented "Jennine's presentation of material makes it understandable and realistic." She added that anyone who deals with the public needs this training.

To learn about the ServSafe program, visit www.servsafe.com.

