

Free lunch offered to youths

BY LAURA FIGUEROA

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Long Island children who rely on free and reduced-price public school lunches can still count on a midday meal under a federal summer nutrition program that started this week.

The Summer Food Service Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will provide free lunch to low-income children younger than 18 at 26 locations in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

"Now that school has ended for the summer, many children will lose their one chance to have a balanced meal during the day," said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and chief executive of Island Harvest, a nonprofit that is managing the program locally.

"Proper nutrition is essential to the growth and development of children, and many of them, especially those in the low-income spectrum, don't always have access to good, wholesome food," she said. "The Summer Food Service Program helps bridge that gap."

There are an estimated 88,000 children in both counties who rely on the program during the school year, according to state figures. Island Harvest anticipates serving 1,400 Long Island children during the summer.

The federal summer program, which annually provides meals to 2.2 million children nationwide, was launched in 1968 to curb childhood hunger. According to federal guidelines, centers must be in neighborhoods where at least half of the children are from families whose incomes do not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty line. That is \$3,554 a month for a family of four.

About 5 percent of Nassau residents and 5.7 percent in Suffolk live in poverty, according to U.S. census figures.

"Hunger has become a year-round issue on Long Island and even though food may be plentiful for most of us during the summer, for many Long Islanders, including children, finding enough nutritious food is a daily struggle," Dresner said.

Parents may call Island Harvest at 516-294-8528, ext. 126, with questions about eligibility and center locations.



PHOTOS BY RANDEE DADDONA

Ronkonkoma

tion destination, with hotels, bars and restaurants built around beaches, and floating docks ringing the shore.

The diving team has mapped the remains of a floating dock, which still has the metal hoops that bound the long-disintegrated wooden barrels together.

Pfeiffer said he expects to find more relics from that era. "There are plenty of stories about Model Ts being pushed into the water. Every time I dive down here, an old timer comes over and tells me stories," he said.

Another startling find has been Christmas trees.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation used to run an artificial reef program in the lake in the 1990s, Pfeiffer said. "They tied cinder blocks to Christmas trees and sank them," he said. "After ten years or so, they get waterlogged and fall over."

Another oddity: "We're finding coconuts. Dozens and dozens of coconuts," Pfeiffer said.

The likely source, according to Pfeiffer: All the bars that used to serve pina colodas to vacationers, who would then hurl their coconuts into the lake.