



OSGOOD STAYS PUT

SPORTS: Former North Salinas High School standout signs deal to remain with the Chargers. **Page 1C**



EVENT IS COMING

Inspirational stories and what you need to know to get ready for this year's Relay for Life. **Inside**

The Salinas Californian

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Today's forecast/6C

A few showers; cool



66 high
47 low

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HEALTH

School districts to help battle obesity

They're working with program to promote healthier lifestyle

By **RIA MEGNIN**
The Salinas Californian

As school districts across the nation respond to a new federal mandate that they adopt wellness policies by the end of June 2006, Monterey County could become a model for the state.

Thirteen of the county's 25

school districts are working with HELP Inc., a private/public partnership agency formed in January 2004 to reduce childhood obesity. HELP's staff provides school districts with step-by-step procedures for setting up wellness policies they provide, as well as support services and new after-school nutrition, gardening and physical activity classes. The agency also will work to bring more fresh fruits and vegetables into school meals and encourage more exercise.

"It's important for our children's health," said

Suzanne Du Verrier, HELP's wellness and nutrition consultant. "We have an epidemic of obesity. We need to change people's habits, and good education and good nutrition go hand-in-hand."

Each campus will have a "wellness council" to study how to change school policies on food. Model policies emphasize serving fruits and vegetables, banning sales of cookies and candy for fund-raisers and changing what's available in vending machines from items like soft drinks to fruit juices and flavored waters.

HELP Executive Director Mike Pippi said obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States and worldwide.

"We've got a generation of young people that are going to be seriously ill by the time they're in their 30s and 40s if we don't do something," Pippi said. "It's America's health crisis, and the schools are a big part of the solution. The kids need to be informed about not only what you should eat but why you should eat it."

Irene Vargas, director of food services for the Alisal Union School District, said

TO GET INVOLVED

Community partners are needed to help keep students eating healthfully and staying active. Contact Suzanne Du Verrier or Mike Pippi at the HELP offices at 372-3616.

she's excited about starting the program.

"It'll influence not only the children but the parents and the community to change our habits in some ways," Vargas said. "People will see the message everywhere."

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