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Laura Lynn Iacono: A Nutrition 'School' For Kids

By Celene McDermott

Quick stats:

Laura Lynn Iacono, RD, operates *One Potato, Two Tomato* in Albertson. She lives with her husband, 10-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son in Nassau County.

The name, *One Potato, Two Tomato* conjures up images of that fun game "One Potato, Two Potato" which kids play on the playground when deciding who will start a game. Laura Lynn Iacono, a pediatric, adolescent and family registered dietitian for over 15 years, thought a nursery rhyme or game would be the perfect name for her new healthy lifestyle education center for kids which opened in Albertson last year. And why not, "One Potato, Two Potato" like the famous rhyme? The answer is simple. "It's too much starch!" Laura Lynn says.

"I've never believed in fad diets or pills or dieting for kids," she explains about the center's concept. "You can't treat children like that. Children are not adults." Instead, she takes an adult model that's focused on three components—nutrition education, youth fitness training, and counseling behavioral issues—but teaches kids on their level. Kids learn how to measure, how to read food labels and are taught the basics of the food pyramid using lots of visualization, plastic models, colors and labels, all in a group setting.

The center, which receives most of its business through referrals, offers classes for kids ages 8 months to 19 years including Infant/Toddler and Child Palate Training and Behavior Modification for ages 8 months to 3 years; Early Childhood Nutrition Education Enrichment and Developmental Functional Fitness for ages 3-5; a Fit Kids Program with age-appropriate fitness and nutrition education for ages 6-11; and for tweens and teens, fitness and nutrition programs and Boot Camp Fitness.

How did you get this idea to open a center for kids?

I started out at New York Hospital -Cornell in Queens and Manhattan. I did all my critical training there. I always had an affinity for mater-

nity and pediatrics. Then I went out to private practice and did family counseling. I had my own children, and became even more inspired! I veered off and became a youth fitness trainer. I rented space at a doctor's office, which had a gym area. As I got busy and started to grow, I wanted to get a center.

Tell us about the philosophy of *One Potato, Two Tomato*.

This is a healthy lifestyle education center. Some people tend to shy away because they think it's a 'fat camp.' We help fight childhood obesity, but it's not our only focus. We focus on rearing kids to eat healthy, on prevention. I have plenty of skinny kids who just want to learn how to take care of themselves. We try to have this clinical concept, but make it friendly so that kids don't feel like they're coming to a hospital or a doctor's office. We want it to feel like a children's fitness school.

Why not just go to a nutritionist?

The thing that makes it unique is, we are a health care team that's dedicated to providing health care services and clinical services. We are all credentialed. We have a kids' gym. The difference is that we treat them as children. I don't lecture the kids. Pediatrics is a specialty. We deal with growth charts. Children develop calorie, protein and macronutrient needs at every single age. So someone who deals with adults all the time and then counsels a kid.... the skills are not there.

What kind of problems do you see besides weight management?

I have babies that come in for palate training, for moms who didn't catch that window for introducing texture properly, and the kids are spitting everything out. If parents don't get a good grasp right way, then chicken nuggets and French fries could be their child's first finger foods. They don't know how to give them fruits, or how to mix it, or wonder if they should hide things in it.

How do you counsel parents on introducing healthier food to children who love junk food?

There are certain foods that kids are going to love from the get-go that are salty, fatty and



sweet. If you start out with processed foods, their palate is going to like that. The child's palate is like an artist's canvas. So when you think of how you're going to paint that palate, you think of colors—you want to give the healthiest things. You want to start out with wholesome foods like fruits and vegetables.

How do you manage to raise a family while operating the business? Did you ever face any food issues at home that inspired your work?

No, not at all. My kids are such great eaters. I believe that that is because of me; I was fun and I gave them good foods. The kids come here after school. They participate in the classes and eat dinner here and do their homework. I have no food battles.

What kind of challenges or hurdles did you face when opening your own business?

The hardest thing, from a business standpoint, is people's perception of the concept. We're not a fat camp. We're not like that at all. It's a new business with a new concept. Once they're here, they're like, 'why isn't everybody here?'

For more information, visit www.onepotatotwotomato.com.