

## **Linda Vento**

### **Silver Star Friend of Child Nutrition Award**

#### Question 1

School nutrition is very personal for Linda, she is very dedicated to the field because of her three nieces and nephew. Linda has offered many nutritious ideas for Food Service Directors to use to encourage students to eat meals. This is part of her position as a sales representative, but she takes this to a personal level by getting family involved in taste testings, recipe development, numerous meetings with children one on one - on what the kids want to eat, and by telling them why it is good for them. Linda has been a front runner in knowing the Meal Pattern Standards, and has been helping to educate students, parents and directors of the positive changes in the food service industry- making the transition to healthier eating easier. Linda gets the children involved by letting them create their own food items, and how they want it to be served to them. In Linda's own words, "I feel like they are my own kids". The children enjoy the participation because she makes them an important part of the process, and every opinion counts. The children make rewards for her, and also always ask when she is coming back to do more education and product development. Linda always puts the kids first, and enjoys the students and their smiles. The information the children share with Linda is passed onto manufacturers, and distributors. Linda does this four to six times a month with different groups of children throughout Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland and this year starting in Ohio. Linda is an advocate for the School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania, locally, statewide and nationally. Linda is active in the local chapters of the school nutrition organizations by preparing meals and educating fellow food service workers on the products we serve. Linda has served on the School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania board for three years and has also served on the conference committee. Linda's creativity, enthusiasm and love for children and school nutrition have helped her to encourage food service professionals to look at the "Big Picture" and be more active and participate in school nutrition, education, conferences and lobbying. Linda has been and advocate for the School Nutrition Association by attending the Legislative Action Conference the past five years, and lobbying legislators in Washington DC with SNAPa (School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania). Linda deserves to be recognized for her passion and dedication to school nutrition.

#### Question 2

Linda has a personal interest because of her nieces and nephews, and has been active in this field for over twenty years. Linda promotes school nutrition any way she can. Linda coordinates think tanks with directors outside the normal workday where directors and her will sit and discuss child nutrition issues, and come up with ways to make them positive and then share this information with other

directors. In addition to get directors and their staff educated, Linda coordinates with different manufacturers ways to get continued education for directors and their staff members. Linda's enthusiasm is very contagious and encourages people to do better and do more. Linda pushes people to excel and "think and perform out of the box" without them even knowing she is helping them do more for themselves, their program and their children. In addition, Linda works closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to train directors on USDA commodities that are available, what they can be used for and how to use their ordering systems. Linda will set up four to five training's every spring to help educate directors on how to order food for their students every year. Linda works many late nights and weekends because she is so passionate about her career and the children. Linda with another colleague made several lunch trays and posted pictures to Food Service Directors on how to make attractive lunch trays for students. Parents have commented on these trays saying, "Our lunches did not look like that 30 years ago, they lunches look great!". Linda loves her job, the children and her career. Linda should be recognized for her years of dedication and passion for the children and school food service. Linda is an Excellent candidate for the Friend of Child Nutrition Fame Award.