

PEOPLE

A taste of life



H-E-B dietician Kylie Bentley brings culinary creativity to shoppers

By Dane Anderson
Staff Writer

H-E-B has been open for a year and a half in the Village at Westlake shopping center, and already it has become a daily focal point of community life.

A sign of the advent of fall, hundreds of big orange pumpkins line up around the entry doors to the store, appearing to beg for the chance to be taken home and carved into grinning jack-o-lanterns. Toddlers are drawn to them like magnets – pulling at their stems and chasing the rolling gourds as they wobble and bump into each other between grocery carts.

In the chilly morning hours, moms and dads corral their preschool children into carts and set about their business, intent on shopping for the weekend. Inside the store, they find an ally in 20-something Kylie Bentley, H-E-B's registered dietician. She's there to help local residents choose between artichokes and asparagus, parsnips and peas and cranberries and Clementines. Bentley is passionate about food and about helping others find the right groceries to bolster their health and excite their taste buds.

"I'm here to help people reignite their own passion for food," she said. "Going to the grocery store can be an exciting experience. I love showing people how to use an inexpensive item to add some excitement and change to their lives."

One of only two dieticians working for the H-E-B company and the only one to be based in a store, Bentley puts together health and nutrition classes for customers, designs employee wellness programs and conducts community outreach. She also helps customers personalize their shopping experience.

Want some of that kind of help? All you have to do is ask. With all the negative information circulating about food in the media today, Bentley said many people become intimidated about grocery shopping. Too much negative information, too many choices, not enough time – it can all turn what should be a pleasurable life experience



Photo by Dane Anderson

TOP: Registered dietician Kylie Bentley helps H-E-B customers like Gretchen Inman and her daughter, Adelaide, get out of the rut and bring passion back to the dinner table through creative food choices. **ABOVE:** Seafood manager Raul Weaver gives Bentley an up-close and personal look at a fresh-caught female Mahi-Mahi fish. Bentley spends her days talking to customers about what's in season and what can add some variety to family menus.

into something dreadful.

"You can easily get stuck in a rut – eating the same things over and over again and not getting any real joy from it," she said. "I like to teach people how to use things like fresh herbs to add a very powerful punch to a meal. I like to show people that great meals can be very simply done."

All of Bentley's recipes are short and use plain ingredients. Her cooking classes are conducted in the store break room with what amounts to a sauté pan and a burner.

"I tell people in my classes that we are going to prepare our food pretty much in a campsite cooking area," she said, smiling. "I tell them that, if I can cook it here on this equipment, you can definitely cook it at home in your kitchen with no problem."

Most months, Bentley offers a class a week at the local H-E-

B. The classes range from vegan cuisine to French to Caribbean to classes that focus on things like fresh herbs and whole grains.

"Our customers like to have a lot of variety," Bentley said. "We listen. Basically, we can do anything you want."

Besides teaching classes and helping curious customers pick out new things to tease their taste buds, Bentley also works with people with dietary restrictions.

"A lot of time, people come in right after they have received a health diagnosis like diabetes or gluten sensitivity, and they are upset," she said. "I love to tell them, 'No – you can still eat completely normally. Let me show you how good food can taste.'"

Bentley grew up in Austin. After getting her degree in nutrition at the University of Texas, she did her internship

at Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas. She worked in several medical offices, but missed the connection with other fervid foodies. She's found a perfect home at H-E-B.

"Here I can shop with people up and down the aisles and then say, 'Let's go cook!'" she said.

How does the community dietician stay fresh and come up with new ideas for others to try?

"I like to come into the store, walk around and say, 'Hmmm. What do people not use?'" she said. "Things always pop out."

All of Bentley's advice and assistance is offered free to H-E-B customers. The company is trying out the idea of an in-store dietician at the Westlake location. If the community takes to the idea, H-E-B may begin putting dieticians in other stores.

"Westlake is a unique store – a cross between a Central Market store and a regular H-E-B," explained Tad Forbis, the Westlake store director. "It's a very up-end store. We felt the clientele here would benefit from a registered dietician and would use the service."

Bentley plans a vegan pumpkin cooking class in the future that will be taught by a culinary chef. As the holiday season advances, she will be offering classes that feature fall and winter menus. She also plans a number of special children's events, including pumpkin carving, gingerbread house decoration and cookie decoration. For more information, contact her by telephone at 732-9930 or e-mail her at info@tastelifeheb.com. Request to have your name added to her newsletter to receive advance notice of upcoming events.