

# Awareness Day Teaches Savvy Shopping, Food Styling, Communicating, Scam Avoidance

**LOU ANN GOOD**  
*Food And Family Features Editor*

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — More than 200 people attended the annual Spring Awareness Day April 29 at the Berks County Ag Center.

The annual event teaches consumers how to become more "shopping savvy" and deal effectively with pressing issues. This year the agenda was packed with information about shopping, food styling, communicating effectively with Alzheimer's Disease patients, and protecting oneself from telemarketing fraud. Some of the topics addressed included the following:

### Shopping Savvy

Consumer Advocate Mary Bach is a watchdog on a variety of shopping issues. Intertwining facts and humor, Bach revealed numerous methods that chain stores and manufacturing companies employ to rip off consumers.

"Don't assume you will get the price advertised in the newspaper or on the shelf," Bach said. "Make sure the price you get is the price promised."

In some cases, five out of 15 items are scanned higher than advertised, she said. Scanner guarantee policies often state that if you are charged a higher price for the item than promised you get the item free.

"But you must ask for it," Bach said. "Make stores accountable. If you pocket something in

the store, you will be charged with shoplifting, but if the store charges more for an item, they are 'shopper' lifting and should be held accountable," Bach said.

"Product downsizing is happening in every aisle of the store," Bach said. "It's legal but deceptive."

Certain brands of coffee have kept the same size can but gradually reduced the ounces from 16 to 11.

"Consumer speak runaround is another deceptive practice," Bach said. She shared how a standardized can of green beans was downsized from 16- to 14½-ounces. When she called the company to complain, she was told, "Actually you're getting more. The old can contained only two servings, but the new can has 3½ servings."

The difference was that the old can attributed one serving to be one cup. The new can reduces serving size from one cup to one-half cup.

"Tell the manufacture you are upset that they are tinkering with the product. It makes a difference if you are using a heirloom recipe that calls for one can of soup and so forth."

Bach's detective work in uncovering consumer fraud has been featured on "Dateline" TV and in many magazines and newspapers. She is the only consumer known to have sued Wal-Mart and won.

### Scoop On Exotic Fruit

Bill Scepansky, Kegel's Pro-

duce corporate chef, said that technology, shipping and handling have made many specialty fruits and vegetables available year-round. Consumers may hesitate to use specialty items because they aren't sure how to use or prepare them.

Scepansky demonstrated using seven different items for food styling. Each of the more than 200 seminar participants got to sample the variety.

• Star fruit is picked green and turns a golden yellow as it ripens. Because it becomes juicy when ripe, star fruit is often used in the green stage. It is completely edible and makes a striking garnish. It can also be cooked similar to an apple.

• Prickly pear has a strong watermelon aroma and flavor. Pare off the barbs. It is a vibrant red inside. The seeds are edible but annoying to most people if not strained.

• Papaya starts green and ripens to gold. There are many different types. Peel, seed, and grate at the last minute to serve as a garnish on vanilla ice cream. Scoop out seeds, dice, and fan on plate for garnish.

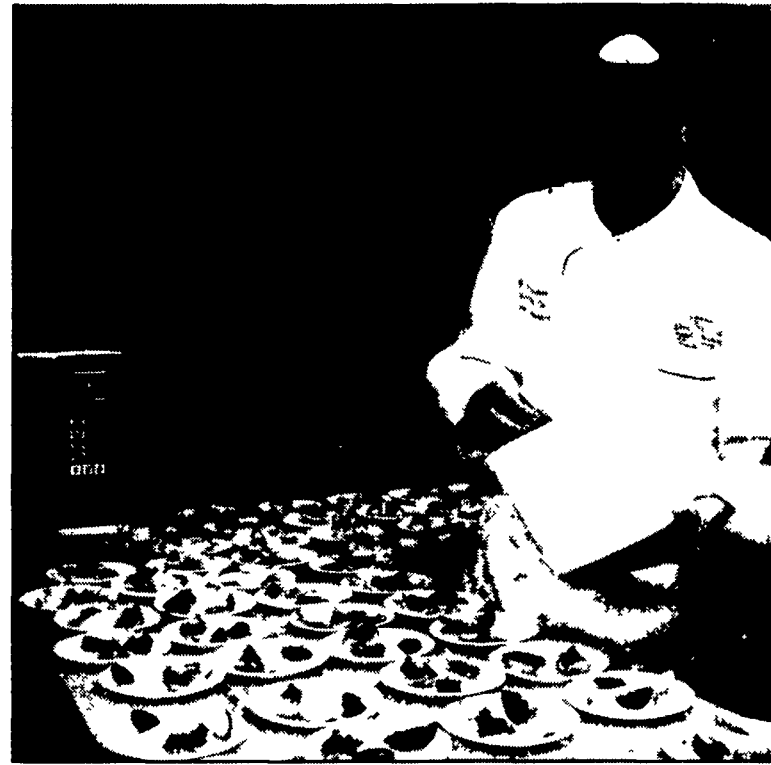
• Mango can be tough to work with but worth it, Scepansky said. Peel and cut around its large seed. Slice paper thin or shave with grater to garnish cole slaw or shrimp. Refrigerates for 2-3 days. Mango has a strong, striking flavor that is common in Indian cuisine.

• Kiwi is most easily peeled by slipping a spoon beneath the thin skin and twisting. It is luscious and refreshing but cannot be used in gelatin dishes because of a strong enzyme that would counteract the gelatin. In addition to food garnishing, kiwi can be used to marinate meat.

• Blood oranges are dark red inside and supersweet. Make sure they are red outside before serving.

• Hickama peels like a potato, has a thin skin, and a texture like a potato but doesn't discolor. They are crisp and mild and go well with fruits.

• Avocado starts green but turns black when ripe. There are many varieties. Cut around the big pit, and twist in half. Whack knife into seed and it comes out. Put in water, the avocado will float.



**Bill Scepansky, Kegel's Produce corporate chef, presents the scoop on exotic fruit.**

• Quince is usually used in jellies and preserves. Place a roasting rack over and mixing bowl, press down, and the quince is ready to use.

### Communicating With Alzheimer's Disease Patients

Claudia Strauss, author and adjunct professor at Albright College, believes body language and attitude is the secret ingredient needed to effectively communicate with Alzheimer's Disease patients.

Strauss said that many of the tips she gives in the book she has written on the subject may sound simple but are effective.

"Focus on them as the person they have always been. Expect to enjoy the visit, and they will sense it. Body language creates a feeling in the air. Even if you are only with an Alzheimer's patient for a few minutes, make a conscious effort to concentrate on the person. Slow down, speak slowly, and leave pauses for mental processing."

Alzheimer's patients often ask the same questions repetitively. Strauss recommends answering as if it were the first time they ask, but also change your physical position. Offer the patient food or water, which often causes the patient to perk up.

"Always protect the person's

dignity," Strauss said. "Ask how lunch was, instead of what did you have?"

Strauss said it is important for caregivers to recognize the different stages of Alzheimer's in order to understand the patient.

"Your tone of voice is important. Affirm them, acknowledge their feelings," Strauss said.

### Don't Be A Victim

Trooper Raymond J. Albert of the Pennsylvania State Police said, "Don't fall for a telephone line — make sure money goes for a good cause, not into a con man's pocket."

Albert revealed many telemarketers strategies that defraud consumers. He advises only giving to local charities with which you are familiar.

Albert also warned against giving credit card numbers over the phone and how to protect oneself from identity theft.

To report telemarketing fraud, call the National Fraud Information Center at (800) 876-7060.

In other business, a \$500 Berks County Extension Homemakers' Scholarship was presented to Kathryn Stanislav, student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The scholarship is awarded annually to a student pursuing a consumer science or related degree.



**Consumer Advocate Mary Bach reveals deceptive advertising tactics. Countering these tactics allow shoppers to make wise choices.**



**Family and Consumer Science Educator Fay Strickler, left, presents an award to Rita Lesher for her many years of service on the Family Living Advisory Committee.**



**Claudia Strauss, author and adjunct professor at Albright College, shares tips on how to communicate effectively with Alzheimer's Disease patients.**



**Kathryn Stanislav, left, accepts a \$500 Berks County Extension Homemaker's Scholarship from Rita Lesher.**