

Decolonizing Diet Project reconnects with region's foods

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ZEBA - In 2012, Martin Reinhart and 25 volunteer test subjects began a research study that would change many of their lives, an entire year in which they'd eat only food that existed regionally prior to the arrival of Europeans.

Dan Roblee/Daily Mining Gazette Kristine Maki, seen roasting corn, ate only foods available regionally prior to European colonization as part of Northern Michigan University professor Marty Reinhardt's year-long Decolonizing Diet Project. The dietary overhaul quickly became a family affair, including sons Rion, left, and Aene.



Reinhart, a Northern Michigan University professor and Sault Ste. Marie Ojibwa, told guests about the Decolonizing Diet Project (DDP) Thursday at the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community's and Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative's Pre-Colonization Dinner.

The goal, Reinhart said, was to reconnect humans with the foods indigenous to the Great Lakes region.

"I predicted if we ate indigenous foods for a year, we'd get better, biologically."

It turned out he was right, he said.

"As a group, we showed reductions in weight, girth and body mass index. We had significant reductions in blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose level."

Personally, he lost about 30 pounds.

It wasn't all easy, though, according to study subject and KBIC member Kristine Maki.

"We had to gather food. It took a lot more time, and it was a big change," she said. "Instead of coffee, we drank dandelion tea, which looks and tastes similar. We had to look at food as way of survival, rather than something to enjoy. It was challenging at times."

Reinhart said the project was hardest at the beginning, when subjects came to meetings offering each other very basic foods.

"This is pumpkin-seed shells. This is berries. This is meat," he remembered.

But by the end of the year, they were using those and other foods as ingredients in complex, delectable recipes. They even had a cook-off with food professionals as judges, and Reinhart will soon be publishing a cookbook based on what they learned.

Maki said the experience made a huge impact on study participants' lives, and on their families'.

"It made us appreciate food more," she said. "The kids ate along with me as a family. It was nice bringing them closer to nature, to the creator and to the earth."

To learn more about the study, go to decolonizingdietproject.blogspot.com.