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Healthy Heart

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IN NON-PROFIT BUSINESS

One of the most important and much needed non-profits in Westchester is the Cancer Support Team located in Purchase. With Executive Director Tania Weiss at the helm, along with her extraordinary staff and volunteers, it is clear that their mission to enhance the quality of life for cancer patients and their families has been going strong for over 42 years.

When asked how CST is meeting the current challenges of COVID while continuing to keep staff and patients safe, Weiss responded, "The COVID crisis certainly made life more challenging for Cancer Support Team. What makes us different from other agencies is the personal touch. The core of what we do is to visit patients in person one-on-one at home. In that setting it is much easier to educate, support and help them find resources. So, our nurses, case manager and social worker have gotten creative. Meetings take place on the front steps, in the park, outside in a parking lot. Of course, everyone follows CDC guidelines regarding masks, vaccines and maintaining social distance. When needed, we also

use telemedicine, but we find ways to be there for our patients."

Weiss spoke about the rewarding aspects of heading up CST. "Having cancer is really hard, and it affects the whole person – physically, emotionally and of course financially. "As a board member for eleven years before becoming the executive director, I was familiar with the programs CST offers for free to cancer patients and family members. Today, by experiencing firsthand the problems our patients have to handle, I recognize how needed CST is and love being part of a team that works very hard to make the cancer journey a little easier. We cannot cure the disease, but we can make a big difference in the lives of our patients. For instance, our nurse Fran who accompanies her patient to the oncologist to help her ask questions and understand more about her diagnosis and treatment. It isn't because the doctor doesn't explain things well, but because like many of us, the patient is anxious asking a medical professional a question, and in addition, in her culture, she has not been taught to



advocate for herself. Another recent situation was when CST was able to provide immediate funding for pain medication for a stage 4 pancreatic patient who could not afford it, and

otherwise would be suffering. The list goes on and on, but everyday there is a reason I am so happy to be part of CST."

Article continues on page 11



Hearts & Homes for Refugees is a nonprofit community grassroots organization that works with the U.S. Department of State-designated agencies to resettle refugees and to build more welcoming communities.

As the U.S. government works to quickly move the remaining 20,000 Afghan refugees off military bases and into communities across the country, Hearts & Homes for Refugees is redoubling its efforts to expand community sponsorship in the region.

In August 2021, the world watched on in dismay as Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. More than 76,000 refugees arrived at eight U.S. military bases. By the time they leave the bases to restart their lives in communities throughout the U.S., they are thoroughly vetted, vaccinated and processed.

Hearts & Homes Founder and President, Kathie O'Callaghan, reminds us, "These are our allies and friends who stood by the U.S. as the

war raged in their country for twenty years. They need our help, a place to call home."

With the federal government planning to move the remaining 20,000 Afghans off the bases during February, O'Callaghan states that there is an urgent need for more volunteers to join or create Community Sponsor groups to welcome them to the Lower Hudson Valley.

Community Sponsors are made up of volunteers who provide a strong network of support. They find and furnish homes, provide a warm welcome, connect new arrivals to employment, help families enroll children in school, learn English, navigate the medical system, orient them to the communities where they are resettling, and more.

"We are a welcome wagon made up of trained and passionate volunteers. We assist refugees by providing a soft landing in every possible way for better long-term outcomes as new Americans," says O'Callaghan.

In the last four months, Hearts & Homes has resettled six cases in Westchester County and furnished apartments for three additional families in New York City, as well as supported other Community Sponsor groups with their own resettlement cases.

O'Callaghan says, "Our goal in this current crisis is exactly what it has been for the last six years—to resettle refugees and to inspire others to join this movement. And when they do, we are there to assist, share best practices and resources." She emphasizes "It is this spirit of volunteerism and collaboration that ensures we bring the best that Westchester County has to offer our new neighbors."

Hearts & Homes for Refugees was the first community sponsor to resettle a refugee family in Westchester. Since then, it has been leading the way, educating, engaging volunteers and donors across the Lower Hudson Valley, and partnering with resettlement agencies such as Catholic Charities, HIAS and IRC to resettle, assist and

Article continues on page 11

A START TO A

Healthy Heart

BY LAUREN HURWITZ



This month, medical professionals across the country celebrate “Go Red for Women” – an American Heart Association campaign empowering women to know the symptoms and their risk for the number one killer of all women – cardiovascular disease. Jennifer Miller, Executive Director for the American Heart Association says the campaign was created about 17 years ago to raise the awareness level, and level of dialogue among women when it comes to heart health, and to make them feel more empowered to address their symptoms and not be dismissed – especially in the ER.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Dr. Damara Gutnick, President of the American Heart Association’s Westchester Board of Directors says knowing personal health numbers like total cholesterol, blood sugar, BMI and blood pressure can literally save a life. In addition, knowing family history about heart disease and stroke, and sharing that with a



Dr. Damara Gutnick

doctor can make a huge difference so that he or she can properly think about your risk and possible diagnosis. A first visit with your physician will help calculate your risk factors such as age, weight, if you smoke, and your overall lifestyle habits. Depending on what is determined at the appointment, you may need to be seen more regularly to keep an eye on your health. In addition, Dr. Gutnick suggests visiting the Mayo Clinic’s website and clicking on their Heart

Risk Disease Calculator to get a free, individualized assessment for your risk over the next 30 years, in less than 90 seconds.

In addition to making sure all women know the warnings signs of a heart attack or stroke like shortness of breath, worsening exercise tolerance, or pain, Dr. Gutnick works to promote health equity. Noting black and Hispanic women are disproportionately affected by heart disease, Dr. Gutnick hopes to improve the quality and access to care for the entire population here in Westchester County. “There are significant differences and barriers based on structural racism that have led to the disparities in health outcomes for women of colors in general. [For example,] if you don’t have access to healthy food during a pandemic when the food bank is giving out millions of pounds of food each month because of an increase in food insecurity, it’s hard to stay healthy when they’ll take any food that is provided.”

EAT YOUR WAY TO A HEALTHIER HEART

West Harrison resident and nationally celebrated health and nutrition expert, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, Joy Bauer, can often be seen on the *Today Show* sharing her tips and tricks. Specific to heart health, she recommends eating more produce, thinking small and reimagining your favorite indulgences.

Bauer suggested adding “a produce item to every meal. [Choose] produce high in volume and low in calories so it fills you up without filling you out, so it can help you lose or manage weight. Veggies and fruit also shower your body with important nutrients, vitamins and minerals, like fiber, which helps lower cholesterol, and potassium, which can help manage blood pressure. Plus, antioxidants in produce can help tame inflammation. At breakfast, add berries to oatmeal or stuff your omelet with mushrooms and spinach. At lunch,



Joy Bauer

layer your sandwich with lettuce, tomatoes and onions—and enjoy crunchy carrots on the side. And start dinner with a salad and enjoy green beans or broccoli with your fish or chicken.”

Bauer is a fan of “smaller, short-term goals [since they] can be even more powerful because they reinforce success every step of the way. Set weekly health goals that are concrete and obtainable. For example, one week, commit to trying a new fitness class or experiment with two unfamiliar fruits or vegetables. The next week commit to brown bagging your lunch to work each day. Another week, you can choose to prepare two new recipes for dinner that week, and so on. Then celebrate these mini-achievements (with non-food rewards) so you’re reminded that hard work pays off.

She believes “restrictive eating and deprivation diets don’t work. Go ahead and enjoy all your favorite comfort foods whenever you want without worrying about calories, sugar, fat, carbs and guilty aftermath. The secret: Learning to health-ify them with simple strategies. Love pasta? Enjoy spaghetti squash or zucchini noodles instead of starchy spaghetti. In the mood for rice? Try cauliflower rice instead of the regular white version. Love cake? Make a single-serve mug cake so there’s no tempting leftovers.”

Flavoring food in a smart way is an easy way to take control of your heart health. Bauer says, “Sodium can increase blood pressure, and hypertension or high blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease. Most healthy people should consume no more than 2,300 mg daily; the cap drops to 1,500 mg for those who have hypertension or

are at risk of heart disease. You can flavor up foods using fresh or dried herbs and spices, lemon, lime, garlic, onions and so on. When shopping for canned soups, beans and other items, opt for no-salt-added or reduced sodium varieties. And always compare labels to choose the lowest sodium options.”

Lastly, make going to the grocery store easier on yourself, and your heart. “If you can plan at least a few home-cooked meals each week, that’s amazing! Then, make a list of the ingredients you’d need for each. Try to stick as closely as you can to your list,” says Bauer. She suggests being an “outsider” at the store.

“Typically, the healthiest staples are located on the perimeter of the store (low-fat milk and yogurt, produce, lean protein, etc.) Try to make most purchases from these areas,” she says. And of course, checking labels is key. “You’re looking to minimize added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium content. Remember, less is best. Bonus points for products that feature ingredients you know and can pronounce.”

NEW FOR 2022

Raising about \$700,000 annually enables the AHA to launch new projects and services through Go

Red with funds being put to work here in Westchester. Miller says this year, the organization is expanding its local blood pressure monitor program. Right now, Westchester residents can visit a handful of local libraries to check-out a free blood pressure cuff to monitor levels and check for hypertension, no proof of health insurance required. New to 2022, there will now be a public healthcare worker at the specific locations once or twice a month to answer questions and connect patients back to care who can follow up. Locations include Yonkers Riverfront, White Plains, Mount Vernon, Peekskill and Ossining libraries.

Miller is also excited to expand Go Red to focus on pre-natal, pregnancy and post-partum care. “These are women who are at the top of their game in terms of health – young healthy vibrant and they’re dying. We need to address this population of women especially as they go through a pregnancy so their health can be optimal during this time in their life.”

Those who want to be involved in raising funds for the AHA and their health programs should check the Go Red website for more information about a series of upcoming



Jennifer Miller

auctions, evening events in person and online, and digital ways to fundraise to support their programs throughout the year.



RESOURCES

goredforwomen.org/en/
mayoclinichealthsystem.org/

joybauer.com

RECIPE FROM JOY BAUER
SEE PAGE 13
Lentil Veggie Superfood Stew

WOMAN of Impact Westchester

Mitzi Ambrose-Washington is the 2021 Westchester Woman of Impact Winner and is serving as the 2022 Westchester Woman of Impact Chair. She is leading this dynamic group of women, inspiring them to rally people in their networks to drive the mission of the American Heart Association | American Stroke Association forward in the community, and creating a lasting impact in Westchester.

Mitzi resides in Westchester with her husband and daughter. She is a pharmaceutical sales professional, a proud graduate of Howard University, a STEM advocate for girls, and active in the community as a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, The Links Incorporated, The Junior League of Bronxville, The Guidance Center of Westchester, and a former Public Affairs Officer (PAO) in the United States Naval Reserve. Whether at work, volunteering in the community, or having fun with family, Mitzi strives to be an “everyday hero” for her daughter and future generations.

“I am honored to join the Go Red for Women movement. Together we can make difference in our community.”

Mitzi Ambrose-Washington



Mitzi Ambrose-Washington

2022 Westchester Woman of Impact Chair
2021 Westchester Woman of Impact Winner

“One evening in the fall of 2020, I was home working on my computer when the right side of my face and right hand started to tingle. I knew right away something was wrong. I called my doctor and he told me to go straight to the emergency room because I could be having a stroke. Unfortunately, my doctor was right and after several tests, I was told I had a mini-stroke.

I knew that stroke runs in my family. That evening, my fear became a reality. But I was determined to fight for my 8-year-old daughter and husband. Genetics and family history would not win this battle.

The Woman of Impact movement empowers women to lead the way in transforming the state of women’s health across the nation. Women are nominated to join a team of change-makers, dedicated to making a direct impact and a lasting difference in the health of our communities, including here in Westchester County.

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Lili Chu began her career as a fashion designer and illustrator in New York City. After hearing about microblading from a friend who struggled with Alopecia, she fell in love with the healing and transformative power of Cosmetic Tattooing. Over the last few years, Lili has received numerous certifications in all the services provided at DermaStudioNYC and is fully licensed in NY State. Their website, www.dermastudionyc.com is full of very helpful FAQ's to prepare you for all the various procedures offered. Take a moment for yourself or book an appointment for a loved one. *See their ad on page 11.*



Angela S. Gillen

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[Cancer Support Team article continues from page 7](#)

Most of us know someone who has had cancer. The statistics are about two in five will get a diagnosis at some point in our lives. Westchester County has great cancer centers, but CST has found that many patients need additional support outside of the medical setting. Whether it's coping with anxiety, chemo brain, fatigue, financial fears, or even what to say to your kids, there are any number of issues patients and care givers have. CST wants to be there for any family that lives in southern Westchester and is dealing with cancer. The need is to make sure people are aware that there is help available.

[Hearts and Homes for Refugees article continues from page 7](#)

advocate for refugees.

Hearts & Homes has provided Community Sponsorship support to nearly 200 refugees, and helped to launch new or assist more than a dozen Community Sponsor groups since 2016. In addition to resettling refugees, Hearts & Homes' services range from ESOL tutoring to drives for winter coats, school backpacks and personal products. These distributions have served more than 500 refugees and asylees each year in the tri-state area.

Founding Board member, Donna Shirreffs said, "Not only did Kathie envision that Hearts & Homes would resettle refugees, but her goal was also to build a longer welcoming table by engaging as many volunteers and groups across faith, civic and youth communities as possible."

Today, Hearts & Homes continues to expand its active and ongoing partnerships with U.S. Resettlement Agencies as well as other community groups and local nonprofits that work hand in hand to resettle Afghan refugee families in our communities.

Because Cancer Support Team does not charge for their services, they have to raise every dollar every year through grants, events and donations. They are one of the few agencies in the county that offers financial assistance grants to patients who qualify. This money is used to pay for items that insurance will not cover – co-pays, medical equipment, even the rent or utility bill. It's hard to heal from cancer if you are worried about putting food on the table. Even small donations help to offer these grants, and remember they are very local, the money goes to help your friends, family and neighbors. Anyone who is interested can go to www.cancersupportteam/donate. Last year they gave over \$62,000 to cancer patients in need.

"'You've got cancer' are three words no one ever wants to hear", says Elish McGrath, CST's Director of Patient Services. "The experience can be overwhelming, and no one should ever have to go through this alone. Our team is here to help you partner with your doctors, figure out the finances and even provide counseling and emotional support. I know we make a difference."



According to Program Director Amy Robertson, Hearts & Homes is recruiting, training and onboarding new volunteers as quickly as possible. "We will commit to responsibly resettling as many families as we can provide volunteer teams for, and we welcome the opportunity to help other community sponsorship groups get started."

According to O'Callaghan, "Hearts & Homes for Refugees will provide guidance, resources and fundraising assistance to those who raise their hands and say 'How can I help?'"

Learn how you can play a vital role as Community Sponsors in supporting the resettlement of new Afghan neighbors. Contact: [Hello@Heartsandhomes-forrefugees.org](mailto>Hello@Heartsandhomes-forrefugees.org) Learn more at www.heartsandhomesforrefugees.org

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IS IT MENOPAUSE OR COULD IT BE HEART DISEASE?

Sneaky symptoms make it hard to tell. Here's the doctor's advice.



BY DR. SHALINI BOBRA

Hot flashes, night sweats, unexplained fatigue. Most women recognize these as signs of menopause, but they might be surprised to learn that these ailments could also be signs of heart disease – the #1 killer of women.

It's important to understand that menopause doesn't cause heart disease, but the risk certainly increases around this stage of life. To further complicate matters, some common symptoms of a heart problem could mimic what we tend to think of as menopausal symptoms.

Before menopause, the risk of heart disease is low in women. The reason? Estrogen is a friend to blood vessels, keeping them flexible and adaptable to blood flow. When estrogen levels decline as a result of menopause, the blood vessels lose some of that resilience, upping the risk of arterioscle-

rosis, a clogging of the blood vessels. In fact, an overall increase in heart attacks among women is seen about 10 years after menopause, according to the American Heart Association.

Know the Risks at Any Age

Women have their own unique set of conditions that predispose them to heart problems. Otherwise healthy women who sit too much, maybe as a result of being locked in during the pandemic, may be at greater risk of a heart attack. One study showed that having an autoimmune disease (rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, etc.) doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease, due to chronic inflammation. In addition, those who are dealing with ongoing states of stress or depression – leading to elevated stress hormones that can increase blood pressure – are also at risk for heart disease.

Get a Symptom Check

If you're around the age of menopause (average age around 51) and

have been noticing the following signs, take pause and consider consulting with a Cardiologist or Internal Medicine specialist:

- **Fatigue.** It's natural to feel more tired as you age, and it's a common menopausal complaint. But if simple activities like carrying the laundry upstairs or walking out to the mailbox that were once a breeze are now suddenly difficult, this could be a warning sign.
- **Sweating.** Three-quarters of all women experience hot flashes during menopause. It's worth mentioning to your physician if these sweats are associated with shortness of breath or chest pain, especially when you haven't been exerting yourself or there doesn't seem to be any real cause.
- **Chest Pain.** While chest pain alone isn't necessarily a menopause symptom, it's worth mentioning that it is the most commonly ignored symptom by women who suffered a heart attack and then

reflected on what they had experienced beforehand, according to a 2012 study by the University of Barcelona. Chest pain isn't always the "grip your chest"; it could be just simple discomfort, pressure, or feeling that something isn't right.

The good news is that, despite this long list of risk factors, 80 percent of cardiac events can be prevented with small, simple daily changes. The first and foremost change would be to quit smoking. I tell my patients another simple step is to just move 30 minutes a day. Also, adopting a Mediterranean style diet focusing on greens and grains, legumes, and lots of fiber has proven to benefit the heart.

Dr. Shalini Bobra is a cardiologist with White Plains Hospital Physician Associates, seeing patients at 99 Business Park Drive in Armonk. To make an appointment, call 914-849-7900.



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BECOMING YOUR BEST

“YOU”

BY LAUREN HURWITZ

If you want to improve what you see in the mirror, modern medicine may be the solution for you. But where to begin? Dr. Alessandrina Freitas, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon at White Plains Physician Associates says, “You want to be treated by someone who is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. Prior to your appointment, think about what your personal goals are and how much down time, if any, you’re willing to commit to.”

For 2022, Dr. Freitas is excited about a new in-office, sedation-free procedure known as radio frequency micro-needling. Common for the face, neck, upper chest or back of hands, “it makes tiny little perforations in the skin and delivers radio frequency to the tissue under to stimulate the production of collagen and elastin resulting in a tightening and rejuvenating of the skin.” Many patients choose to have a series of 3 treatments separated by 4-6 weeks. “It’s most common to do this on the face, neck, upper chest, back of hands and anywhere you want to see a visible difference in wrinkles or the elasticity of skin,” says Dr. Freitas.

Treatments like Botox and filler are always a popular choice among women in Westchester. The former acts on the muscles under the skin to decrease visibility of unwanted wrinkles in areas such as the forehead, the glabella (space between your eyebrows), and crows feet with results lasting four to six months. The latter is common “under the eye lids to give more volume to the mid-face for a more youthful appearance or augmenting the lips and jaw line as people age,” says Dr. Freitas. Depending on the type of filler, results can last six to 18 months

and can be an affordable option for patients that delivers natural results. Longer lasting options for volume enhancement include fat grafting, a procedure that involves “taking fat from elsewhere on the body and injecting it in selected areas.”

Often, one of the first signs of facial aging is chronic sun damage - uneven skin tone, freckles or brown spots, skin that appears dull, or red spots around the nose or cheeks. For patients looking for a high return on investment with little to no down time, Dr. Freitas suggests in-office treatments with IPL (Intense Pulsed Light), a modality that uses broadband light to improve overall skin tone and texture, and decrease visible signs of sun damage. “Now is the perfect time to do this treatment since you won’t be repeatedly in the sun. You can often see results in one treatment, while some patients opt to do consecutive treatments or maintenance appointments once a year,” says Dr. Freitas.

Dr. Freitas says, “Start slow and build. Don’t come out of the gate doing 20 different things because it’s very hard to take away whereas it’s easy to add. I believe in a very natural aesthetic. I want my patients to look refreshed, and rejuvenated, not necessarily frozen or augmented. The goal isn’t usually to look ‘different’ - the goal is to look like a better you.”



RESOURCES

[wphphysicianassociates.org/
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At Home with Hurwitz

BY LAUREN HURWITZ

CREATING THE PERFECT Zen Den

Carving out time to relax can seem impossible but with the perfect space waiting for you, life may be a little less chaotic. Dobbs Ferry based Jessie Asya Kanzer, is a Tao expert and author of the upcoming book, *Don't Just Sit There, Do Nothing: Healing, Chilling, And Living with the Tao Te Ching*, says taking time to connect with yourself is very important and hard to do if you don't have a *specific* place to do it in. "It doesn't have to be a giant space, it can be a little space – even in a closet – the rule is that it has to be *your space* and nobody else's." She believes that while

you can add incense, a vase with flowers and other items that make you feel calm, starting with something as simple as a comfortable pillow to sit on that is yours, and only yours, can create a space of calm.

Creating a Zen space is very different than creating the overall aesthetic of your house. "The way we decorate our homes are so important to us. Some people consult with interior decorators and some people want it to look a certain way. But when doing Zen space, you should start bare boned, with a

meditation pillow when you can sit and get quiet. Then, your space can evolve as you use it. Start using it, sit down and do nothing for a few minutes every day, and let the space develop from there," says Kranzer.

Finding the proper scent can also be imperative in enjoying your Zen space as aromatherapy can help mentally transport you to another place. Kranzer suggests finding a scent that resonates with you as, "do nothing" time either through candles, flowers or even oil to rub on the wrist and visit your "you" space regularly.

Yaz Quiles, star of HGTV's new design show, "Table Wars" and Iona College graduate says in addition to tapping into all five senses, good lighting is key for having a great Zen space. "A sunroom will give you lots of Vitamin D during the day along with natural light, but I also think about lighting in the evening. For example, I like to have a couple of options of lighting like overhead lighting that I can dim, or candles." Quiles also stresses the importance of creating a quiet space that you can enclose with doors or even drapes, and make sure everything in the room is soft, textured and cozy to the touch.

"When we think about being 'Zen,' a lot of people think of yoga and tea – but one size doesn't fit all. Know what feels right for you and what creates that



Jessie Asya Kanzer

peace within you, and then enhance the space for your needs," she says. "Simplicity is key – don't pack a space with too much stuff because it's supposed to be Zen. Having a tree, mat or a rock sounds great in theory but it can be overwhelming in a space. Make it super minimal so you're focusing on the actual peaceful part of having time to yourself."



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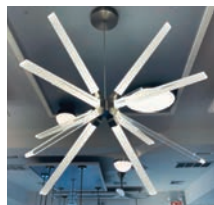
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THE Chef's CORNER

Lentil Veggie Superfood Stew



RECIPE COURTESY OF JOY BAUER

This stew is for you—it's super delicious, super hearty and packed with super germ-fighting oomph. I make it with nourishing ingredients like lentils, onions, bell peppers, mushrooms, spinach, carrots, and more (seriously, the list goes on and on!). The best part? You can toss everything into one pot, and once the lentils are cooked and tender, you have a delicious bowl of goodness. I recommend making a double batch today; then enjoy a cozy bowl for dinner and freeze leftovers for tasty meals ahead!

NUTRITION FACTS (Amount per Serving)

- Calories: 200
 - Protein: 11 g
 - Total Fat: 3 g
 - Unsaturated Fat: 3 g
 - Saturated Fat: 0 g
 - Cholesterol: 0 mg
 - Total Carbohydrate: 9 g
 - Dietary Fiber: 7 g
 - Total Sugar: 5 g
 - Natural Sugar: 5 g
 - Added Sugar: 0 g
 - Sodium: 105 mg
 - PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES
 - TOTAL TIME: 40 MINUTES
- This recipe makes 10 to 12 cups*

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups small diced red onion
- 2 cups small diced carrot
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or grated
- 2 cups small diced bell pepper (red, orange, yellow)
- 2 cups sliced shiitake mushrooms (may swap in cremini or button mushrooms)
- 1 cup small diced celery (~2 stalks)
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste (or 1 cup tomato puree)
- 1 pound green lentils
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 quart vegetable broth
- 6 to 8 ounces baby spinach, washed and patted dry
- Ground black pepper to taste

PREPARATION:

In a medium to large pot, add the oil and warm over medium-high heat. Add the onions, carrots and garlic and sauté for 3 or 4 minutes. Then add the peppers, mushrooms and celery. Season with salt and sauté until the veggies begin to soften, about 4 to 5 minutes. Add the tomato paste (or puree) and stir to coat the vegetables.

Add the lentils, bay leaves, thyme and broth. Bring to a boil, cover the pot partially with a lid, and simmer for 30 minutes, until the lentils are firm, yet tender (al dente). Stir in the spinach and let it wilt into the hot lentil stew. Add black pepper, and additional salt to taste.

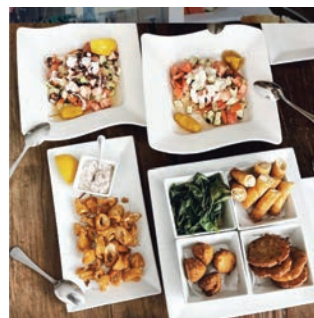
Note: Instead of dried green or tan lentils (not red since they become mushier), you can easily swap in 3 to 4 cans drained and rinsed beans (black beans, chickpeas, cannellini, edamame, and so on) or canned-pre-cooked lentils. Because these options are already cooked, add when all of the liquid is already incorporated and simmering.

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