



# Staten Island Advance

## Famed cardiac surgeon gets star treatment on Island

Dr. Mehmet Oz, author, frequent Oprah guest, appears at health fair

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Star-struck students and parents swarmed a celebrity yesterday at Tottenville High School, but it wasn't Brad Pitt.

Instead, a slender and smiling dark-haired cardiac surgeon was the focus of the frenzy, with dozens of people jostling for a photo and a word with best-selling author and lecturer Dr. Mehmet Oz.

"I saw this guy on Oprah," said one student as the doctor arrived at the Huguenot school's HealthCorps fair.

Dr. Oz is one of the famous talk show host's frequent guests and favorite health gurus. He also founded the nationwide HealthCorps -- an organization Dr. Oz compared yesterday to the Peace Corps for its practice of putting recent college graduates into high schools to teach young people about nutrition and health. He first realized the need for such an organization after operating on 25-year-olds with heart disease.

HealthCorps is especially important on Staten Island, where heart disease is the number one killer and where diabetes and obesity are on the rise.

"The only way to reverse the problem is to teach kids about how sacred their bodies are," Dr. Oz said yesterday.

The surgeon credited his wife, the former Lisa Lemole of New Dorp, with helping create the program. He started on Staten Island yesterday before heading to HealthCorps fairs at high schools across the city.

Tottenville Principal John Tuminaro said his school already sponsored an annual health fair and jumped at a chance to be part of the two-year HealthCorps program, which is funded by the City Council. Councilman Vincent Ignizio (R-South Shore), who also attended yesterday's event, nominated the school for the program.

"(Dr. Oz) gives us the celebrity factor, but he's also got a lot of resources," Tuminaro said yesterday.

Those resources have included a full-time school health coordinator paid for by the HealthCorps foundation and free pedometers, which measure how many steps students take during the day. The school also began offering a spinning class after school to students and staff.

HealthCorps is designed to help young people approach food with a critical eye and analyze ingredients, said Rob Roberts, director of education for the program. He said it's not only expected to help lower rates of diabetes and obesity, but also teenage pregnancy and suicide.

Amanda Dasaro, a senior at Tottenville and borderline diabetic who focuses these days on her sugar intake, said she's glad the program is offered at her school. She volunteered at yesterday's health fair and brought her mother, a major Dr. Oz fan, to the event.

"It's his brain -- he's amazing," Miss Dasaro said of the doctor's X factor.

Student Carina Favale said her parents began following Dr. Oz "religiously" after her father suffered a heart attack.

Raymond and Angela Kascler of Great Kills brought their young son and daughter to the event, which also featured live music, health screenings and fitness classes. Raymond Kascler got a picture with Dr. Oz, whom he had seen before on Oprah.

"Us men have to take care of ourselves, too," said Kascler.

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