Peg James of NorthStar Health Systems serves West Iron County third graders snacks from their school garden during a Harvest Celebration at the hospital's cafeteria. The program was a collaboration between the hospital and the WIC schools.

IRON RIVER—A group of West Iron County students enjoyed the fruits of their labor Nov. 5 when they returned to NorthStar Health Systems for the first Harvest Celebration.

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"We felt that growing a school garden was a wonderful opportunity for these children to have a hands-on learning experience to watch the process of a seed growing into the end product," said Denise Maloney, the West Iron County schools' early childhood coordinator and health and wellness coordinator.

"Children learn best when they are actively involved in their curriculum," Maloney said.

Last spring, the second graders planted a school garden with help from NorthStar Health System employees.

"The hospital tended to the garden over the summer months," Maloney said, "and then this fall the same children, who are now third graders, went out to the hospital for a Harvest Celebration to taste the fruits of their labor."

The project, she added, fit into state curriculum guidelines mandating that the life cycle of plants be taught in second grade.

Last week, students gathered in the hospital cafeteria to enjoy spaghetti squash in tomato sauce and pitas with vegetables—fresh from their garden.

"This experience helps reinforce the farm-to-table concept," Maloney said. "Many children today don't know where their food comes from."

The project was funded by a Fuel Up to Play 60 grant, an initiative sponsored by the United Dairy Council and the National Football League. The grant encourages children to get at least 60 minutes of exercise daily and make healthy food choices.