

Fasting from Fast Food

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I wrote about a Federal Trade Commission report that revealed the nation's food industry spends about \$1.6 billion annually on marketing their products – most of them unhealthy – to children. I mentioned how I bought lots of junk food tied in to the promotion of the last Star Wars movie.

The FTC report also showed that of the \$1.6 billion, \$294 million was spent on marketing by restaurants. Coincidentally, yesterday the latest Star Wars movie – the computer-animated 'Clone Wars' – was released. To promote it, McDonalds is offering Star Wars toys in their Happy Meals. I hope my kids have a craving for hamburgers for the next month.

Because they don't all offer healthy alternatives, Los Angeles' City Council is considering a year-long moratorium on new fast food restaurants in South L.A. The moratorium, which was approved in committee, is designed to give the city time to try to attract restaurants that serve healthier food.

The ban is a result of high obesity levels in the impoverished L.A. neighborhood. According to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 30% of adults in South L.A. are obese, compared to 19.1% for the metropolitan area and 14.1% for the affluent Westside. Minorities are particularly impacted: 28.7% of Latinos and 27.7% of blacks are obese, compared to only 16.6% of whites.

Health officials claim the preponderance of fast food joints has a direct link to obesity. According to a report by the Community Health Councils, 73% of South L.A. restaurants were fast food, compared to merely 42% in West Los Angeles.

Several communities throughout the U.S. have banned fast food restaurants, however, most of the bans were designed to preserve a city's historic character. The L.A. moratorium instead cites residents' health. The Golden State has taken the lead in legislating health concerns. Last month, California became the first state to bar trans fats, which lowers levels of good cholesterol and increases bad cholesterol.

The City is hoping the ban will bring healthier restaurants and grocery stores to a community that desperately needs them. City officials feel healthier options will definitely result in happy meals.