

# Program on eating a plant-based diet

By **Jordan Krom**

Dr. Neal Barnard stopped by the Burgin Center for the Arts at Mercersburg Academy on Sept. 26 to deliver his lecture "Power Foods for the Brain" to an audience that could not have been more excited to listen.

Dr. Liz George introduced Dr.

Barnard as a man with a long list of accomplishments, including the many newspapers and TV shows to which he's contributed, as well as his being the founder and president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). The man of the hour came onstage to cheers and

applause before diving right into his presentation.

Dr. Barnard started off his talk telling the audience about his grandparents and how they and his father all suffered from Alzheimer's once they hit their 60s. His sad story of how drastically the disease changed their lives, as well as the lives of everyone around them, took him into the discussion of memory. The doctor explained how memory works and how common issues with memory are becoming in our society today, ranging from mild lapses to full-blown Alzheimer's.

Dr. Barnard said that despite how grim the diagnosis seems, there is a way to combat these diseases and keep your mind sharp and healthy, even when you believe you're destined to be afflicted.

"Genes are not destiny," Dr. Barnard said, speaking of the gene responsible for Alzheimer's. He compared the Alzheimer's gene to a committee, where the gene merely makes suggestions, as opposed to other genes that

are more like dictators, such as your eye color. "We're having an epidemic of Alzheimer's," he said gravely, "and it's going to get worse."

(See DR. BARNARD... page 5)



Dr. Neal Barnard signs books for eager fans outside the theater about 20 minutes before the talk is scheduled to begin.

Photo by **Jordan Krom**

## Dr. Barnard...

(Continued from page 1)

Dr. Barnard then described a series of tests done on groups of people in Chicago over a number of years, and how scientists monitored what they ate and how much of certain things they consumed on a daily basis, such as saturated fats. He showed that people who ate healthier, plant-based diets were much less likely to get Alzheimer's, even if they had the gene, than those who chose to eat an unhealthy diet that included meat and dairy.

He also spoke about certain metals that should be consumed in certain small amounts, mainly iron and copper. While the body uses those in small amounts, too much can lead to an unhealthy brain. The same sort of topic was touched upon with aluminum, which is present in certain foods and occasionally in water due to its use in water treatment plants. However, the body does not need any aluminum, and as it also is a large contributor to Alzheimer's, one should be careful to avoid it.

Dr. Barnard also talked about vitamins, and how it is usually much better to get them from food as opposed to pills. He continued to stress that a plant-based diet, free of meat and dairy, is the key to a long and healthy life. "Simple foods without the bad fats, lots of nutrition, will protect you," he

told the audience.

He also advised getting involved in plenty of physical activity, as it is proven to reverse brain shrinkage and improve memory. Intellectual exercise is also important for a healthy mind. Dr. Barnard recommended watching documentaries, reading newspapers, and doing puzzles daily to help keep your brain in shape.

Throughout the presentation, Dr. Barnard told several success stories of people who followed the various plans written out in his books, as well as a few pioneers who discovered how to live healthily all on their own. Dr. Barnard gave two steps to get audience members on their way to starting a healthy diet: first, everyone should at least check out the possibilities of healthy food that he or she actually wants to eat. Once that is done, he recommended trying an entirely plant-based diet for three weeks, using transition foods like veggie burgers if necessary.

He then ended the talk with a sobering fact: "The people who need this message the most are not in this room." Dr. Barnard said that children around the age of eight are currently at an extremely high risk for diseases like obesity and diabetes, and that everyone needs to "make more noise" to get the message of healthy eating to spread.

Following the presentation, a dinner called "Savor the Fabulous Flavors of a Heart-

Healthy Meal" was held in the Ford Dining Hall just across campus. The meal was a colorful variety of vegan dishes, including sweet potato lasagna and vegan meatloaf. A table of delectable vegan desserts was available as well, such as vegan chocolate cake and a few varieties of vegan cookies.

As the dinner wound down to an end, Dr. George held a short presentation about the Healthy Eating Adventure Program that included testimonials from members Nick Lula and Adam Leeper. Dr. George again talked about the importance of getting children into healthy eating habits as soon as possible.

One controversial issue with Dr. Barnard recommending a vegan diet to the residents of Franklin County is that dairy is a large part of the economy in the area, and has been for quite some time. After the dinner and on the way out, Dr. Barnard was able to be reached for comment.

When asked for some advice on how this area's residents should go about living a vegan lifestyle, Dr. Barnard said, "The message is the same no matter where you are." He said that the body always does best with vegetables no matter what area you are from. "We're all in this together," he concluded with a smile.

For more information about the Healthy Eating Adventure Program, visit [www.healthy-eatingadventure.org](http://www.healthy-eatingadventure.org). To learn more about PCRM, please visit [www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org)