



**Circleville Fire Department Captain Arron Kerns** has turned his health around through vegan cooking, and he's working to get his crew on board with the plant-based meal plan by serving up healthy dishes. Since firefighters are on-call at all times and don't have the luxury of leaving the station for meals, Kerns has a captive audience when it's his turn to cook.

Kerns says he loves to cook for the firehouse because, "It's the reward of just fixing somebody a good meal, and to show people that you can make really tasty, healthy food."

This week, Kerns made a brand new lunch recipe for the team: avocado pesto pasta. Lieutenant Dave Robertson said he was looking forward to trying something new.

"You get so many people and especially children that are stuck with chicken nuggets, hamburgers and hotdogs," Robertson said. "People will get used to that and they're almost afraid to try different things. Instead of getting stuck on the same thing all the time, this gives us at least the opportunity to try different things."

Kerns, who has been with the fire department for 17 years, decided to do something about his diet three years ago when he found himself tipping the scales at 263 pounds.

"I was a junk food junkie," he said.

A police dispatcher told him about the **Engine 2 Diet Plan** that had been developed by firefighter **Rip Esselstyn**, whose father happens to run the cardiovascular prevention and reversal program at the **Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute**.

"It took me a week to adjust to eating plant based," Kerns said. After several weeks, "Captain Rankin asked, 'are you slimming down?' I had lost about 10 pounds."

Nine months later, Kerns had lost 80 pounds and his cholesterol dropped dramatically.

"My cholesterol is better now than it was when I was in the military," he said.

Kerns said that the premise of the diet, which has now become his lifestyle, is to eat "nothing with a mother or a face." In addition, eggs and dairy are verboten. Kerns has also decided to cut out overly processed foods and anything containing soy.

"These guys will say, what about protein?" Kerns said. "But vegetables have plenty of protein. And if you do think you need to have additional sources, there's vegan protein shakes."

In fact, per calorie, spinach has more protein than ground beef, and none of the saturated fat.

Not all of the firefighters are as open to trying new things as Lieutenant Robertson. Although they were willing to taste Captain Kerns' Avocado Pesto Pasta, some of them fried up some ground turkey to throw on top.

"I think meat is really a matter of convenience in today's society," Kerns said. "Everybody thinks they have to have it as part of a meal because meat actually makes you feel fuller. When you eat like this, you don't get that weighted-down feeling."

Kerns has an uphill battle convincing his crew to adopt a plant-based lifestyle. In fact, later that evening they were planning to prepare bacon-wrapped pork chops for dinner.

"Typically, what I do is just eat separate," Kerns said.

But he has no plans to stop cooking vegan, with the hopes that the health benefits will rub off.

"It's an acquired taste," he said. "You've got to let things change."

### **Captain Kerns' Avocado Pesto Pasta**

2 avocados, pitted

1 package of fresh basil

1/2 C. pine nuts

2 T. lemon

3 cloves of garlic

1/2 C. olive oil

1/2 tsp. fine sea salt

1/2 tsp. pepper

Sliced tomato

1 package whole grain organic pasta

**Directions:** Add the avocado, pine nuts, fresh basil, lemon, garlic, olive oil, salt and pepper to a food processor. Pulse until smooth and creamy.

Boil pasta in a pot of water until noodles are al dente (about 10 minutes). Toss pasta with pesto sauce. Add sliced tomato as a garnish. Serve with a side salad and enjoy!