



Local News

McCord kids get a heart-to-heart about exercise, nutrition

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Goes with board of health meeting story: submitted photo Students at Seely McCord Elementary School in Benton Harbor take part in a 5K walk in May as part of a year-long Health Communities project funded through the Berrien County Department of Health. The project provided physical education activities and education about the importance of exercise and nutrition. □

A visit from the Organwise Guys teaches students about the value of being active

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BENTON HARBOR - Students at Seely McCord Elementary School will begin the summer a little more health-conscious, thanks to some folks at the Berrien County Health Department and a guy named Hardy Heart.

Hardy is one of the Organwise Guys, puppets who taught kids about the importance of exercise and nutrition as part of a Healthy Communities project sponsored by the health department.

The lessons were one part of the project funded through a \$27,500 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Theresa Green, director of community health, reported to the Berrien County Board of Health

Wednesday.

Health officials realized that many area schools do not have physical education programs that include information on eating right and staying active, Green said. The organizers decided to concentrate their efforts on McCord Elementary.

Hardy Heart was joined by Calci M. Bones, Windy Lungs, Madame Muscle and the Kidney Brothers in teaching the kids through books, videos and activity sheets. The program also included a Food of the Month Club, focusing on a healthy choice for mealtime.

The health department also brought the HopSports curriculum to the school, with videos teachers could use to lead activities in everything from dance to martial arts.

"You have to come see it to believe it," McCord Principal Stephanie Rockette offered in the endorsement of the month on the company's website. "The program comes with so many activities, there is just so much for the kids to do. I don't think that even over the course of a school year that we could exhaust all the possibilities. There is never a dull moment. It is a great behavior motivator and modifier as all the kids want to be able to participate."

The project culminated last month with a 5K walk, using a walking path built through the Benton Harbor Community Development office. Participants received specially designed T-shirts and a tag in the shape of a foot for every mile they walked.

Green expects the program to continue next year, and Calvin Britain Elementary has expressed an interest in hosting the program as well.

In other news, the Berrien County Health Department is the recipient of a \$16,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health, which will be used to compile and distribute information on health disparities, Green reported.

Providing access to health care is dealing with the problem "after the fact," Green said.

The purpose of this study is to look at the factors that create an unhealthy community in the first place, mainly economic status, she said.

The information will be passed on to other health departments and will be used to push for policy changes to create healthier environments. Another goal is to improve communication within the black community, Green said.

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