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Programs in South Portland and Cape Elizabeth empower students to take charge of their food and fitness choices



Cape Elizabeth High School seniors Brian Stephenson, Sam Naseef, Owen Perrson and Frankie Underdown carry kayaks to Kettle Cove during their adventure gym class, designed to encourage students to learn about local outdoors activities. (Suzanne Hodgson photo)

CHARTING A HEALTHIER COURSE

By Suzanne Hodgson
Staff Writer

Two animated characters race around a track on the TV screen as two South Portland Mahoney Middle School eighth-grade students, Ethan Shrestha and Chris Perkins, laugh even as they struggle to maintain their breath.

Their enthusiasm extends beyond the classroom: Chris' father, Kevin Perkins, says the Wii program keeps his son moving and the program makes him, "more aware of what he needs to do to be healthier, how much he can eat, how much he needs to move, and how much time he can just sit in front of a screen."

The students are running in place and exercising for fun as part of the Let's Go! health care initiative. The Let's Go! healthier lifestyle school program, 5-2-1-0 Goes to School, teaches students how to lead a healthier

lifestyle with the additional goal of curbing rising obesity rates.

Shrestha and other students met with administration last year to ask for three Nintendo Wii interactive game systems for the school. The group from teacher Jeff Kasaka's Reach Program, which helps children take responsibility for what happens in the school, made the case for how the school's money from a Let's Go! grant could be used for Wii parties instead of unhealthy pizza parties.

Nearly three-quarters of the student body has had a Wii party at Mahoney. The party comes with juice instead of soda, peanut butter and celery sticks with chocolate shavings that are called grasshoppers or fruit salads. Students and home economics teacher Jeanette Coulette designed the food to be healthier but still satisfy students' taste buds.

Cape Elizabeth High School also received a grant from

Let's Go! and the Cape Elizabeth Education Foundation, but the high school took a different approach. It used the money to improve its cafeteria with the addition of a large salad bar, panini maker and cold-cut sandwich area.

Juniors Ben Berman Jr. and Sydney Banks weighed in on the decision after high school wellness director Karen Burke and Elaine Brassard three years ago championed for a healthier outlook at the school.

"It's really about getting everyone into the cafeteria and getting them excited to eat better" said Banks, who now along with Berman, admits to enjoying the healthier food more than traditional hot lunch offerings.

Mahoney and Cape Elizabeth High School have reported better behavior, concentration and attendance in school from students who participate in the evolving health programs.

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Turning a leaf

Vacation business rebounds after summer's soggy start

By David Harry
Staff Writer

Andrew Sloan, 5, said there was one place his family had not visited after arriving from Sacramento by way of Cape Cod.

"We haven't been to Africa yet," he said as he perched on his father Tim's shoulders and looked past Portland Head Light.

Africa was not on the Sloans' itinerary, but the late summer visit made by the family is the type local business owners hope will help them rebound from a slow start to the tourist season.

From the Maine Office of Tourism to local inns and restaurants, marketing Maine past Labor Day is being embraced and the results have been surprisingly profitable.

At the Clambake Restaurant on Pine Point Road in Scarborough, manager Don Roth said this is the first year the

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Sacramento, Calif., residents Tim and Dana Sloan visit Fort Williams after driving from Cape Cod with their sons Andrew and Tyler. Tim Sloan said they wanted to see lighthouses, eat lobsters and watch the foliage change colors. (David Harry photo)

BRIEFING

A window on the past
Sea Scouts helped celebrate South Portland's 50th anniversary in 1948.
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Sports Talk
Cape Elizabeth's Kyle Toot scored four touchdowns Saturday for Kenyon College in Ohio and was named the North Coast Athletic Conference Player of the Week.
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Fitness

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Let's Go! program pediatrician Victoria Rogers and Heidi Kessler, the school intervention coordinator, credit school involvement and their use of grant money for the program's success. Let's Go! is working with more than 200 schools across Maine. Eight monetary donors have allowed 53 schools in greater Portland to receive more comprehensive support.

The program began in 2006 when Anthem Blue Cross, Hannaford, Maine Health, Maine Medical Center, TD Banknorth, Unum, United Way – and Harvard Pilgrim the following year – donated time, money and company employees to start a demonstration project in 2007 with nine schools in the Old Orchard Beach, Biddeford and Saco area.

Child obesity in Maine has reached upwards of 66 percent according to Let's Go!. During the past decades, children stopped having sweets as a treat and started relying on them with every cafeteria meal. A day in the life of a student could consist of a pizza party for the end of the year, cupcakes for a birthday, a candy bar for a good test grade and lunch consisting of soda, french fries, greasy pizza and a brownie.

Maine amended the child nutrition program in public schools in 2006 by removing all soda and some unhealthy foods from schools. Whole milk and 2 percent milk are a thing of the past at Mahoney and Cape Elizabeth schools. French fries and desserts have been limited or eliminated, and cupcakes no longer are brought in on birthdays.

Schools that once relied on soda machines and snack items to bring in additional dollars now balance their food budgets and a healthy lunch by offering baked chips, Smart Food popcorn and crackers.

Let's Go! aims to work in communities, after school programs, child care, health care and the work place and with schools through 5-2-1-0 to reach the greatest number of people.

Schools receive money to use at their discretion only if they can sustain a program that doesn't single out specific children. Grants have been used for water bottles, nutrition speakers and snowshoes. Some schools let students sit on fitness balls during class. Instead of candy, rewards now include no homework passes or listening to iPods. Recess is never taken away because research shows children need exercise.

Kessler and Rogers say they must reevaluate needs and changes on an almost daily basis, but they say greater Portland has seen much success.

In the beginning, Let's Go! and 5-2-1-0 made strict requirements for teams championing the program in schools.

"You had to have a team and the principal on the team and food service instructor on the team," said Kessler. "Now we try to take schools from where they are to where they want to go."

If one school can find a support staff and champion for a change, Let's Go! issues the money and technical support in a workbook filled with ideas and listens to ongoing needs. In April Let's Go! held a symposium for all participating schools to talk about what they were doing and gather ideas from other schools.

"We're on the cutting edge," said Rogers. "It's scary, we fall sometimes."

Cape Elizabeth is currently in the beginning of its third year with the program. After the cafeteria was rebuilt, the Cape Elizabeth Farm Alliance began working with the school to bring in fresh vegetables and local products.

Mahoney Middle School students from Kasaka's Reach Program met once a week this summer to plant a garden that the cafeteria now uses to serve fresh vegetables to the students.

Coulette teaches the students how to cook using these fresh vegetables and other healthier ingredients including whole wheat and flax seed, which some students have never seen before.

The middle school also saw a surge in children joining athletic teams and more students passed or exceeded the goals set by the Presidential Physical Fitness Test last year than ever before.

In Cape Elizabeth, the high school also is expanding an adventure gym class it offers seniors who learn kayaking and lifesaving skills.

Kathryn Germani, principal of the middle school, credits the school staff's healthy outlook for the change. "They are motivated to improve, the philosophy in school trickles down to the kids."

Cape Elizabeth also invites local chefs to cook at the school once a month and prepare meals that cost the same as the regular lunch option. Local lobsterman donated part

of one day's catch last year for a lobster stew and chefs from restaurants five fifty-five and Flatbread Company, which have ties to Cape Elizabeth, also have cooked for the school.

Mahoney is working on a grant to create a composting area and get parents more involved by holding a ride or bike to school day on Oct. 7.

Cape Elizabeth continues to work on nutritional values and, during the first week of school, offered teachers workout classes before and after school.

Let's Go! is looking for ways to keep receiving money after June 2011 when program funding ends. The program is introducing new ads supporting the 5-2-1-0 campaign, five fruits and veggies a day, two hours or less of TV, one hour or more of exercise and zero sugary drinks.

Kessler and Rogers also have been presenting what the schools are doing at school board meetings in all 5-2-1-0 schools to gain support for new initiatives.

Staff writer Suzanne Hodgson may be reached at 282-4337, ext. 237 or news@inthesentry.com.

SMCC offers green building design seminar

Participants in Southern Maine Community College's new green building design seminar will learn about new trends in green building and gain the knowledge they need to make eco-friendly decisions about building a new home or renovating an existing one.

The course will survey basic concepts of passive and active solar design, day lighting, photovoltaic, domestic hot water systems, wind, geothermal and other emerging sustainable design concepts and their application to residential projects.

Classes start Oct. 1 and run Thursdays from 6 to 9 p.m. through Oct. 22. The cost is \$95.

For more information or to register, call 741-5758.

Deep sea program at SMCC

Southern Maine Community College's Science department will present the seminar "Creatures of the Deep Sea: Stories from an ROV Pilot," by Campbell "Buzz" Scott of OceansWide, an oceanography program for Maine students interested in undersea exploration in the Gulf of Maine. The event, which is free and open to the public, takes place 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at Jewett Auditorium, 77 Fort Road on the SMCC campus, and is part of SMCC's Distinguished Lecture Series.

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