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Students take grand tour of human body

Kids also learn health tips

By Henry Bailey

Posted January 14, 2011 at midnight

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Gabrielle Schultz talks to Oak Grove Elementary students during their participation in "Body Walk." The traveling exhibit from Mississippi State University Extension Service is designed to involve kindergarten through fifth-graders in learning skills and choices for a healthy lifestyle. Schultz, a senior at Hernando High School, volunteered to help with the Extension Service's visit.

After taking a nine-stop "tour" of the human body that included a biting lesson from their city's mayor, 9-year-old fourth-graders Grace Owens and Christian Reinhardt learned loads about where they want to be when they grow up:

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"I want to be a lawyer," Grace said. That takes brain power, "and eating a lot of protein feeds your brain."

"I'm going to try to play for the New York Yankees," said Christian. "So always keep your bones healthy so you can stay more active."

For two days this week, the fourth- and fifth-graders at Oak Grove Central Elementary School in Hernando experienced an innovative way to learn about the importance of good nutrition and physical fitness. They did the "Body Walk," a traveling exhibit operated by the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Hernando Mayor Chip Johnson, for whom healthy living is a top city goal and a community development draw, stopped by to step into the "mouth" exhibit to tell students, perched on "tooth seats," the importance of flossing and brushing. A 11/2 - foot-long tooth-brush was an impressive teaching tool -- as was an oversized set of cavity-carved teeth with inflamed gums.

"If I'd known all this when I was their age, I never would have dipped (tobacco)," the mayor quipped later.

Later, at the "lung," kids embraced a three-dimensional healthy pink organ, and shrank from the black, abused lung of a smoker.

"Our tag line is 'Be smart from the inside out,'" said Kate Bouchillon, program assistant with Body Walk. For three years, she's been driving the Ford F-450 truck taking the exhibit to the state's 82 counties. Body Walk will return to DeSoto in the fall at Lewisburg Elementary.

At the Body Walk's nine stations, volunteer presenters from the Senior National Honor Society and the DECA student marketing-business group engaged the kids in a five-minute activity focused on healthy choices. Students left the body through a "cut" in the skin and proceeded through the OrganWise Guys Pathway for Life; this recapped key health concepts from each of the stations.

"It's about empowering kids, so they can make that choice to pick that piece of fruit over the candy, or choose that juice over the cola," said Bouchillon. "And this program is a good fit with the mayor's healthy community agenda."

"We need this, at any age," said Christy Adams, physical education teacher and school Body Walk coordinator.

Grace says she feels empowered to give some perhaps unwelcome advice to her 8-year-old sister: "I'm going to tell her to eat more vegetables."

-- Henry Bailey: (901) 333-2012

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Beefing up health knowledge begins on the Body Tour as students, in groups of eight to ten, walk through a giant ear into the tent-like "brain dome."

Inside, students experience "brain waves" and learn about brain function. As they depart the brain, students are given a bookmark designating them as a carrot, hamburger, piece of cheese or other food. The "foods" then step into the exhibit's larger-than-life mouth.

From the mouth, kids are "swallowed" through the "esophagus tunnel" and move into the "stomach dome." Then they journey through the small intestine where they are "absorbed" into the blood. Then they follow the path of the nutrients to the heart, lung, bone, muscle and skin stations.

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