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## Program offers fun way to teach children about health

**OrganWise Guys has helped with significant weight improvements**

Rogelio de Santiago loves the OrganWise Guys. [Photo slide show inside](#)

**Reporter:** By Heather Darenberg, Staff Writer  
**Email Address:** [heather.darenberg@gwinnettdailypost.com](mailto:heather.darenberg@gwinnettdailypost.com)



Photo: Andrew McMurtrie  
Dr. Michelle Lombardo, president of the OrganWise Guys Inc., left, works out with Alford Elementary fifth-grade students during a health class Thursday in Lawrenceville. The OrganWise Guys is a health and wellness program that began in 1993 to inspire individuals to take charge of their health by assuming personal responsibility for their choices.

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LAWRENCEVILLE — Rogelio de Santiago loves the OrganWise Guys.

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The puppets who personify human body organs have been helping the 11-year-old learn how to stay healthy since he was a kindergartner at Alford Elementary School in Lawrenceville.

"They're really cool guys and they're all friendly. They're our organs and tell us what to do," Rogelio said. "It's better than just learning about organs that don't talk or anything."

The OrganWise Guys Comprehensive School Program offers scientific evidence it is working to transform the health of school-aged children across the country with easy-to-understand tools and lessons about nutrition, exercise and healthy living habits.

And it all started here in Gwinnett County.

In 1993, Duluth resident Michelle Lombardo was a practicing chiropractor with an interest in helping people become healthier. She said she was talking to parents about health and wellness when some suggested that she teach the information to children.

So Lombardo invented the OrganWise Guys to help her do that.

"Children don't understand that eating large amounts of saturated fat on a continual basis may injure their heart," Lombardo said. "However, young ones understand and remember this 'bad fat' message when Hardy Heart shares the scientific information with them through fun and playful stories."

Lombardo teamed up with Karen McNamera, who had attended several of Lombardo's wellness lectures. Together, they started conducting school assemblies in Georgia with the OrganWise Guys.

After a decade on the school assembly circuit, the OrganWise Guys received a \$1.5 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation that allowed Lombardo and McNamera to develop the school curriculum. The program was first launched in

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Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas, but the OrganWise Guys now have a presence in elementary schools in more than 20 states, including Georgia.

Jeri Jones, the health teacher at Alford Elementary, said the OrganWise Guys are developmentally appropriate for elementary kids.

"Kids love to play with the dolls. They know their names, they know where they are in their body, and they know what it does," Jones said.

Lombardo said she thinks students were learning the same information in health classes before the OrganWise Guys, but now the information is presented in a different way.

Subject-based curriculum is built around a group of characters who personify the major organs of the body to teach children as young as 3 years old how to be healthy and smart from the inside out. The characters, such as Hardy Heart and Madame Muscle, make a direct connection with children by explaining the impact that nutrition and lack of physical activity has on each individual organ.

The OrganWise Guys is the only program in the published, peer-reviewed literature to show significant weight and blood pressure improvements, as well as higher standardized test scores, in children who participated in the program as compared to children who did not participate.

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**Posted by: Tom** Location: Lawrenceville on Apr 15, 2011 at 05:55 AM

What a great way to teach kids about making healthy choices. A talking lung. LOL Who would have thought. These characters are like the anti-Ronald McDonald.

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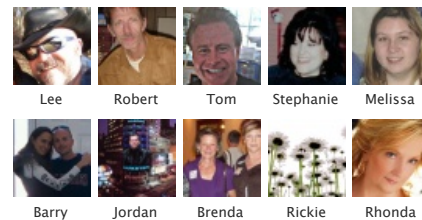
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