

By PAIGE RENTZ



Three Bellows students show off what they've learned in the "Foodplay" game show.

Sometimes it's absolutely fine for kids to play with their food. This is particularly true when, in the process, they learn important facts about nutrition and balancing a healthy diet. At F.E. Bellows Elementary School, students were encouraged by "Foodplay," an Emmy-winning nutrition program aimed at combating the epidemic of childhood obesity, to take charge of growing up healthy and fit. In "Foodplay," Johnny Junk food (Simon Siegel), an aspiring juggler, is led by his coach (Mariette Booth) from an abysmal diet of sodas and potato chips through the ways to make smart, healthy choices about what he eats. Featuring juggling of every major food type, outlandish characters and spoofs, bright colors and lively music, "Foodplay" actors held the attention of their young audience and dished out important facts and statistics to children. For instance, in the United States, the average child eats over 150 pounds of sugar and drinks approximately 600 sodas per year.

Bellows Principal Marge Longabucco, who received positive feedback from both the staff and students, explained that "Foodplay" is the epitome of fun in learning. "Nutrition is not an exciting topic for kids, and when you can put it in a fun type of setting, then they learn something and at the same time, it's enjoyable for them," she said. "Because how enjoyable is it learning about the food pyramid and how many things you should eat from each group every day? But the way they present it, [the children] sit up and take notice, and if you were to come back and ask the children what they learned, they still know things they learned in that performance because it was put in a very enjoyable format."

Maria Proudian, chair of the Rye Neck PTSA Health and Wellness Committee, organized the production. She was pleased with the result, saying she has also received positive feedback from parents, which is fantastic because the students were excited enough about it to talk about the program at home. "They loved it," she said. "I thought [the actors]

were fantastic. They were perfect; they kept their attention; they had audience participation; I think they got their point across; I don't think they were over their heads; I don't think they were too silly; I think they really did a phenomenal job of getting their point across."

The Bellows production of "Foodplay" was funded by an Activate America grant from the Rye YMCA, which also enabled all 368 third, fourth and fifth grade students to be treated to a healthy snack after the production. "Foodplay" is the latest in a string of partnerships with the organization, says Proudian, who has worked with the Rye YMCA to bring new and healthy activities like yoga, Zumba and a fitness boot camp to Bellows students. "Child obesity is on the rise," she said, "so if we could just as responsible parents and adults try to make children aware of the benefits of exercising and eating well."



Rye Neck students learn to juggle their diets