



## 'IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT TO EAT'



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Behind a stage curtain, Carlton Hall of FoodPlay changes into a costume during a performance Wednesday at Southeast Elementary School in Sycamore. FoodPlay is an Emmy award-winning theater show intended to turn kids on to healthy eating and exercise habits.

# Playing with food ... live on stage

## Interactive theater aims to help kids in quest for healthy lifestyle

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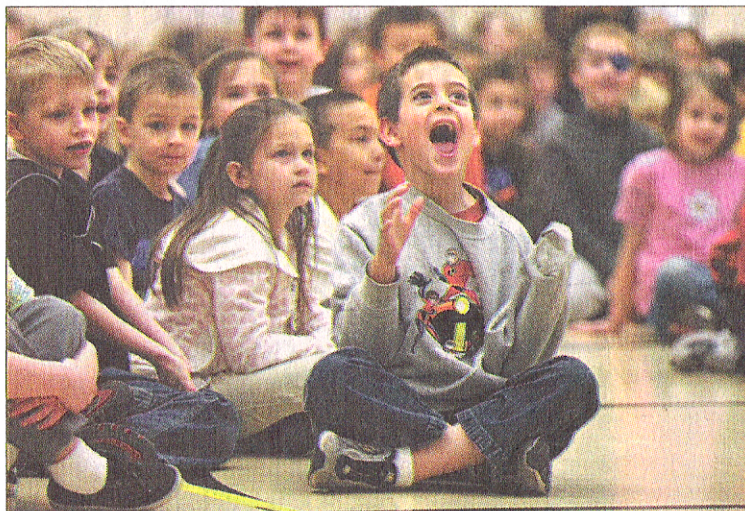
SYCAMORE - Eating healthy is all about moderation.

The more you exercise, the more "extras" or snacks you can feasibly squeeze into your daily diet.

At least that was part of the overarching message presented Wednesday morning during an interactive theater play at Southeast Elementary School in Sycamore. The performance was by FoodPlay Productions, a thespian group that tours the nation performing nutritionally themed shows that aim to arm kids with the skills they need to grow up healthy and fit.

"We all know it's important to eat right," actor Tyson Savoretti said in the play. "But it's not always easy to know what's right to eat."

Savoretti acted as a coach during the performance Wednesday for "Johnny Junkfood," a juggling superstar played by Carlton Hall. The duo encouraged the more



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Kindergartner Rik Kozumplik reacts Wednesday during a performance of FoodPlay at Southeast Elementary School in Sycamore.

than 350 students in the audience to participate through exercises, game shows and answering questions.

They taught the students to "read it before you eat it" - or how to interpret the main ingredients of a food by looking at its nutri-

tional label. They also described the components of the food pyramid, saying that "kids with brains eat more grains," and although everyone should eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, "more is more."

Nancy Davis, the school's

physical education teacher, said it's best to infuse such lessons in children at a young age. She applied for a grant through the DeKalb County Farm Bureau which led to sponsorship for FoodPlay by the Illinois Soybean Growers Association. Two other DeKalb County elementary schools - Shabbona and Littlejohn - were also awarded grants to host the program.

"I really believe in health and wellness," Davis said, referring to it as her "hot button." "Kids really need to understand what they're filling their body with and the importance of being active."

Childhood obesity rates are the No. 1 health epidemic in the U.S., she said, and they have doubled among elementary schoolchildren and tripled among adolescents during the last 25 years.

"What I'm really noticing is more of a gap," Davis said. "Kids who are sedentary are doing even less ... and the active ones are becoming even more active."

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# Healthy eating the message of performance

• HEALTHY

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Southeast Elementary fifth-grader Evan Swedberg said he tries his best to stay busy and move as much as possible.

"You have to eat healthy foods and stay away from all the junk foods," the 11-year-old said following Wednesday's performance. "If you eat too much junk, you will get really lazy and you will lose energy."

The group of kids were lacking anything but energy Wednesday morning. They screamed and cheered for their classmates who were chosen to arrange specific foods in their proper places on the food pyramid.

"This is a great way to teach them healthy lifestyles and healthy eating," school Principal Mark Ekstrom said. "This is fun, dynamic and entertaining."

Third-grade student Kaylee Huffman said she has already learned the importance of making healthy decisions for diet and exercise. She doesn't eat sugar because it's bad for her teeth, she said.

"I did learn lots of new things too," the 9-year-old said. "Eating fruits and vegetables is something you have to do every day to grow up strong."



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Tyson Savoretti (left) and Carlton Hall of FoodPlay perform Wednesday in front of the students of Southeast Elementary School in Sycamore. FoodPlay is an Emmy-award winning theater show intended to turn kids on to healthy eating and exercise habits.