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Students at Reagan Middle School in Tiskilwa were up and moving Monday morning when Foodplay, a national touring company, came to make the case for smart eating. In addition to teaching the students how to make good choices when it came to food, the actors also encouraged the children to get up and be active.

Foodplay at Reagan

Learning about the 'go' foods and the 'whoa' foods

STORY & PHOTOS
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TISKILWA — How best to teach children how to eat properly?

How about combining lots of juggling, laughs and two high-energy characters with a gym full of students.

Foodplay came to Reagan Middle School in Tiskilwa

Monday, bringing its award-winning cast of colorful performers, amazing feats of juggling, motivating messages, music, magic and audience participation. Reagan is one of 40 select schools to see the program, thanks to sponsorship by the Illinois Soybean Association and a grant application submitted by Bureau County Ag in the Classroom.

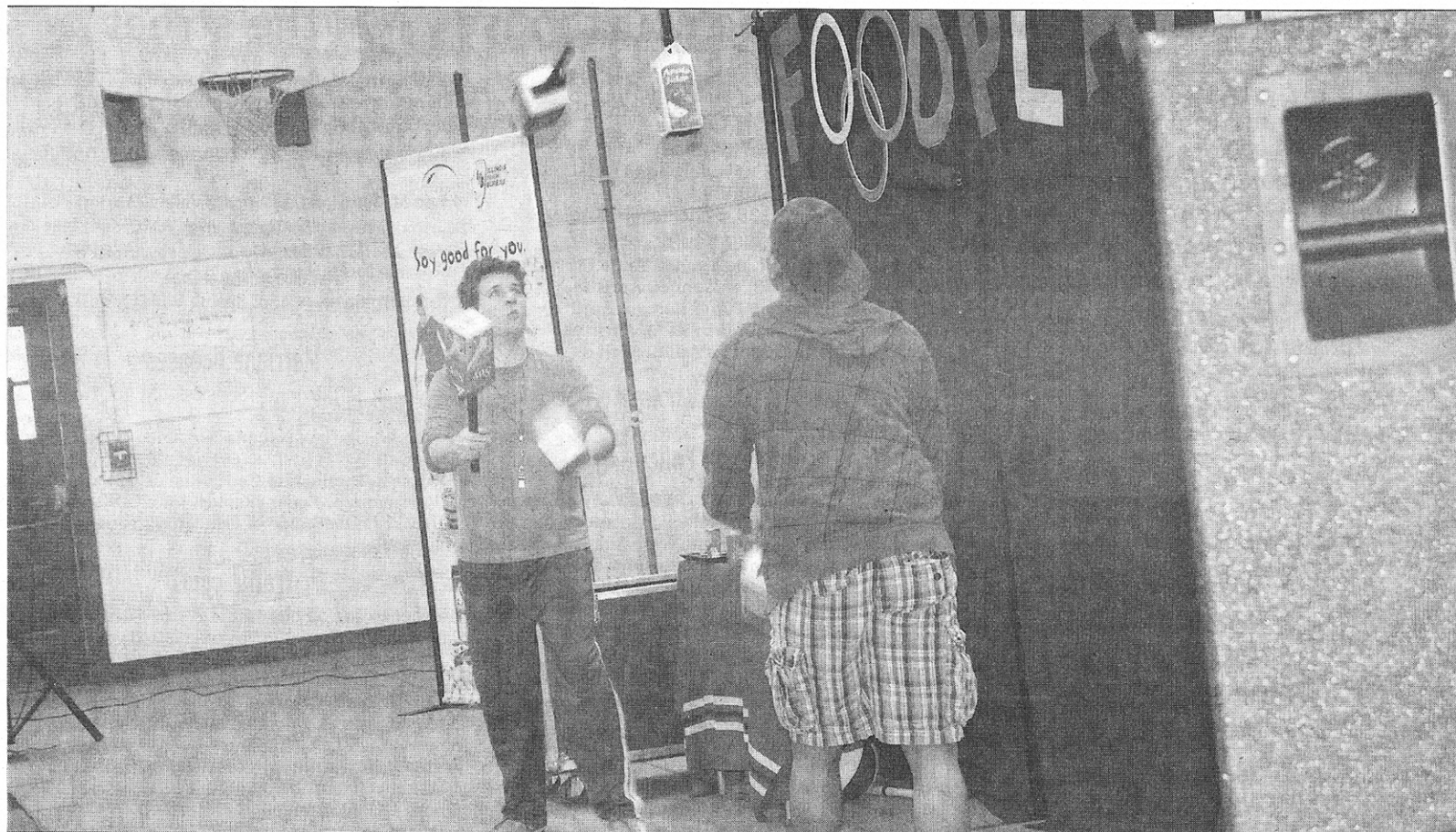
Reagan physical education teacher Chris Anderson was

the driving force behind bringing the production to Reagan.

"I'm real strong in nutrition, and I do a big unit on it; and we talk about exercise and eating properly and getting physically active," she said. "When this became available, we applied for it, and we got the grant.

During a fun-filled performance, children follow the antics of Johnny Junkfood,

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Foodplay actors Tyson Savoretti (left) and Carlton Hall used juggling to keep the students learning and laughing during Monday's presentation. Foodplay is a national award-winning theater show, and is appearing at 40 Illinois schools, thanks to a partnership with the Illinois Soybean Association.

Foodplay

FROM THE COVER

who dreams of becoming a juggling star, but he keeps dropping the balls because his diet stinks. However, with the help of the coach of the National Junior Juggling Team and the students, Johnny learns how to juggle the foods he eats to wind up with a balanced diet.

Through a series of brief skits, the students learn the importance of fueling up with breakfast and being active every day; how to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables; how to cut down on sweets and unhealthy fats; and how to read labels to get the most nutritional value for their money. They discover how to make healthy food choices at home, school and on the run, and to understand how to choose foods that are good for their health and good for the planet too.

Anderson said she was very happy to have received the grant and enjoyed the performance.

"I just thought it was very well presented," she

More information

For food and nutrition tips, free downloads, and fun-filled resources, visit www.foodplay.com.

said. "They talked about all the things that we talked about, the food pyramid and making sure that we're eating properly. I was also very impressed with the fact that they said food is your fuel for your body. Like a car can't go without any gas, you can't go without any food."

The presentation held the students' interest, drawing frequent giggles, and waving hands when questions were asked.

Both Mary Siebert and Arlie Kierski especially liked the juggling, although Arlie admitted he didn't learn anything new.

Callie Hall also liked the performance but said she didn't learn much either because her mom also reads the labels.

"But it was pretty cool like when Johnny started dancing," she said. "That was funny."

Nathan Borgarding also liked it when Johnny started dancing, but he was also struck by one of the statistics.

"Kids drink 600 cans of soda each year," he said, shaking his head. "I'm going to change my drinking habits of pop and stuff, but I'm still going to drink it every once in a while."

The soda pop figures also resonated with Alex Schlessinger.

"There's 10 teaspoons of sugar in a can of pop!" he said.

While Foodplay makes good eating fun, its messages are quite serious. In the last 25 years, obesity rates have doubled among schoolchildren and tripled among adolescents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, of children born in the year 2000, one out of two African American and Latino children and one out of three Caucasian children are expected to develop diabetes if current eating and exercise habits don't improve. Less than 1 percent of U.S. children consume the recommended servings of healthy foods and fewer than half par-

ticipate in daily physical activity.

Jill Frueh, manager of the Bureau County Farm Bureau, hopes the Foodplay program will help.

"I thought the Foodplay program was a great way to send the message to our young consumers about the importance of choosing healthy foods in order to encourage a healthy lifestyle," she said. "I believe this program was a fun and effective way to share the message about good eating habits."

The Farm Bureau submitted a grant to the Illinois Soybean Association which allowed it to purchase books for each classroom and teacher guides for the school. Anderson said the books would be handed out to all the classroom teachers, and the conversation would continue.

She hopes it's making a difference.

"I think they are making better choices," Anderson said. "They are becoming more active, and that's the main purpose, that they take charge of their life, and they make those choices."

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Student Drake Davis (center) was one of three students to participate in a game at Monday's Foodplay performance. Students were taught the importance of reading labels, and how the first item on the label indicates what the product contains the most of.



Reagan principal Bob Bima addresses the students following the performance of Foodplay Monday.