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SPARK makes fitness fun for kids

By PAUL COLLINS
Bulletin Staff Writer

Twenty or so students moved a multicolored parachute up and down to create an ocean as a child portraying a shark maneuvered through the imaginary waters under the parachute. The theme from the movie "JAWS" wasn't playing, but there was a little tension as the children sitting in a large circle on the gym floor at the YMCA in Collinsville waited to see — or feel — which one of them would be the first to be pulled under by the shark.

Nathan Via, 10, a fifth-grader at Carver Elementary who portrayed the shark, said he liked the game of Shark Attack because it was fun and involved exercise. That is the point of that game, Cookie Monster Tag and other activities that are part of the SPARK research-based physical education program which is being used by several after-school programs in this area. In Cookie Monster Tag, a group of 4- to 6-year-olds, called "Cookies," stood on one sideline in the gym facing the opposite sideline. The boy who was designated



Kids in the YMCA Winter Camp play the Shark game. (Bulletin photos by Mike Wray)

Cookie Monster stood in the middle of the gym floor. On signal, the Cookies asked, "Cookie Monster, Cookie Monster, are you hungry?" to which Cookie Monster replied, "Yes, I am!" Then all the Cookies moved at a fast walking pace to the opposite sideline, with Cookie Monster tagging as many as he could before they reached the opposite sideline. Those who were tagged helped Cookie Monster on the next round. Play continued until most were Cookie Monster

helpers, and then it began again. SPARK, a nonprofit public health organization of San Diego State University Research Foundation, stands for Sports, Play and Active Recreation for Kids, according to the SPARK website. The SPARK PE program is designed to help children enjoy and seek out physical activity as well as develop and maintain acceptable levels of physical fitness. According to its website, SPARK has been "countering childhood obesity since 1989."

Paul Rosengard, executive director of SPARK, said, "We bring a whole new slant to physical education. It's not your father's PE, where most kids stand around while just a few actually play with a ball. Our activities are specifically designed to keep everybody involved. Studies have shown them to increase student fitness, enjoyment, sports skills and academic achievement — all without jeopardizing standardized test scores," according to the California School Boards Association website.

The Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness has been implementing SPARK at after-school sites in recent months. Funding from a Healthy Communities Action Team Grant from the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth paid for curriculum, equipment and training for staff members from 12 after-school program sites.

Kayla Craddock, community health coordinator at the Martinsville Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness, said the train-

See KIDS, Page 6-B

PHCC has fitness program for employees

By MICKEY POWELL
Bulletin Staff Writer

J.R. Smith is on a mission to improve the health and physical fitness of his colleagues at Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC). A trainer and fitness coordinator for PHCC's athletic programs, Smith has started helping other college employees develop person-

al fitness plans. So far, about 30 employees have turned to him for help. He understands that about 50 more planned to do so after the holidays. The college started the free program because it "recognizes that healthy employees are productive employees," said Public Relations Director Kris Landrum. She said it also is "a reward for their (employees') hard work."

In helping his coworkers, Smith said, he has found that "most people don't know" how to get started in improving their fitness. He thinks that is because many people have not been required to try and improve their fitness, such as in high school and college courses. To get them started on fitness improvement plans, he checks their blood pressure, heart rates and body fat levels and consults with them about the findings and where their rates should be. He then teaches them some basic upper body, lower body and abdomen exercises — enough for a 40-minute workout in the initial stages of their fitness regimens.



J.R. Smith shows the exercise equipment at Patrick Henry Community College. (Bulletin photo by Mike Wray)

They learn how to use exercise equipment, such as treadmills and moving staircases, in the college's gym. Smith said such equipment is useful, but he recommends that people go outside to walk or run instead. "You get more benefit" that way, he said, because "you're making yourself push your body" instead of just keeping pace with a machine. However, some people dis-

like the outdoors, and sometimes the weather is bad. Smith said indoor exercise equipment is helpful then. Walking and running are good ways to drop pounds and boost heart health but to improve overall health, Smith suggests that people also lift weights. Cardiovascular workouts "just burn fat," he said, whereas lifting weights is "going to get you healthier quicker."

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Get Back On Track!



Above, Martinsville Sheriff's Deputy Jackie Dillard strengthens his arm muscles. At right, Dillard spots for Capt. Bart Hampton. (Bulletin photos by Mike Wray)

Officers keep fit to protect selves, others

By DEBBIE HALL
Bulletin Staff Writer

Local law enforcement agencies do not require officers to participate in a physical fitness program, but many realize the importance of staying physically fit by participating in a physical training program designed to stick with them through the years.

Debbie Kaczor, training coordinator at the Piedmont Criminal Justice Academy, said those enrolled in basic law enforcement training classes at the academy are required to participate in an hour or more of physical training each day.

"It is the first thing in the morning" and the classes can last up to 90 minutes, "depending on what else we are doing," she said.

The physical program is designed to be an "integrated cross training/defensive tactics program," she said.

It includes exercises from Insanity — a 60-day total body conditioning program — and CrossFit, which begins with a belief in fitness and a goal "to forge a broad, general and inclusive fitness," according to its website.

The program includes traditional physical programs such as weight lifting and running, as well as the unexpected disciplines of yoga and Pilates, and footwork exercises (basically drills) in advance of the required two-week defensive tactics course, Kaczor said.

Of the various programs, participants "will tell you that yoga and Pilates are the worst" and most challenging because both are programs of core exercises — those which help align, strengthen and move the trunk of the body, according to Kaczor and online reports.

"This is a very rigorous training program," and trainers C.W. Elliott and Dwayne Wright (of the Patrick County Sheriff's Office) tailor programs to participants' levels, she said.

That may mean dividing into two different groups. For instance, some participants may be more advanced than others.

Completing the program does not result in a grade, Kaczor said. Instead, the object "is the development of their skills and to get them

started on lifelong program of taking care of themselves and taking care of others."

Henry County Sheriff Lane Perry said that combined with "more emphasis on" staying fit in general, the associated health benefits and overall well-being has helped to generate more opportunities such as walking and biking trails and kayaking.

As a result, "more people have taken an interest" in getting and staying fit, including law enforcement officers, he added.

Although law enforcement still creates an environment that may make a routine challenging due to working swing shifts and family obligations that may interfere from time to time, Perry noted that many officers still find time to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines.

That may be more likely in the summer months when better weather makes outside activities like biking, hiking, kayaking and sports more enjoyable, he said.

"We've also had some offi-

cers" become involved in martial arts.

"Overall, I think that over the years, there are more opportunities for physical fitness, and there's been more emphasis placed on it in general," Perry said. Whether or not in law enforcement, "people have taken more of an interest in it."

Martinsville Sheriff's Capt. Bart Hampton said that while there is no formal program, "we do encourage it. Actually, encouraging it is one of our policies."

Many officers work out in the weight room along with fire and EMS workers and any other city employees that wish to participate, Hampton said.

Additionally, several also play golf, are members of volleyball leagues at the YMCA or are involved in local summer softball leagues, he said.

ACTIVATE! also has a bicycle program, and "a lot of our people get involved in that during summer months," Hampton said.

Martinsville Police Capt. Eddie Cassidy said many

officers in the city work out on fitness equipment in the Municipal Building, while others prefer outdoor activities such as biking, walking trails or paying for their own memberships to gyms in the area.

However, we don't have any physical fitness requirements other than to try to stay in shape," Cassidy said.

Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith said there are no requirements for officers in his department either.

However, "physical fitness is heavily encouraged, and most of our deputies do participate in fitness programs," Smith said. "We have physical fitness training equipment in the sheriff's office" which some officers use, while others prefer to pay their own memberships "at other physical training establishments" in the area.

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