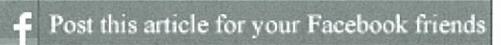


Millville kindergartners each get a turn in mandatory swimming class



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By EDWARD VAN EMBDEN Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, November 29, 2010

MILLVILLE — One by one, kindergartners from Mt. Pleasant Elementary School jump feet-first — some more cautiously than others — into the Holly City Family Center pool and into the waiting arms of swimming instructors.

Once a week for eight weeks, kindergartners from each of the city's five elementary schools participate in swimming and water-safety training at the center. The class — which for some students is their introduction to swimming — teaches the children how to be safe in the water while still having fun.

The school program was introduced in 2000. Funding has been an issue. The program was suspended for two years for a lack of money, and during the last school budget process, it was once again a candidate for elimination. But the Board of Education ultimately approved the \$25,000 needed for the swimming instruction.

Through the program, thousands of Millville's kindergarten students have been taught to swim. While the children think it is nothing but fun, adults believe it is an important tool in helping keep children safe.

"This is so very important," Mt. Pleasant kindergarten aide Kerri Geissel said as her class listened to instructions from aquatic director Sandra Bennett. "Gosh forbid if they were to fall into a lake or a pool without a life jacket."

The kindergartners - mostly 5 and 6 years old - learn how to float and tread water. The goal is to have the children tread water for at least 10 seconds by the end of the course and pull themselves out of a pool.

Geissel said the students look forward to swim day each week.

As one class got out of the pool and walked to the locker room, Mt. Pleasant's other kindergarten class lined up along the side of the pool to take their place in the water.

"Basically what we want to do is teach them safety," Bennett said. "You don't know how many parents don't know how to swim. They can't teach their children. It's an important survival skill.

"They all do really well, and they all seem to enjoy it very much."

Blake Gifford is among the students who find the swimming class at the center both fun and educational.

"It's fun," the 5-year-old said. "You can dive right in. First there was a lot of stuff I didn't know. Now I can pull myself out of the water."

Some parents also showed up to watch their children swim. Five-year-old Jon Boyle's mom, Jamie, and step-dad, Paul Mingin, said even though their son has spent time swimming during the summer, the class presented new information to help keep him safe around water.

Mingin called the program a good refresher. Boyle called it crucial for all children.

"I thought it was a good idea to learn how to swim," she said. "It's something they're going to need their whole lives."

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