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The Selkirk Record

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Laughing and learning go hand in hand

SELKIRK RECORD PHOTO BY BRETT MITCHELL

Puff, second row with pink hair, and DeeDee, purple hair, along with Sparky, kept the kids at Centennial School entertained while they learned about fire safety last week.

By Donna Maxwell

Learning is always better with a smile on your face and some Lord Selkirk School Division students got a heavy dose of learning and laughing last week.

The source of both was Puff and Dee Dee, professional clowns who came to Robert Smith and Centennial schools to teach the students about fire prevention and safety.

Gail Stekler, president of LAFS Canada (Life and Fire Safety) said learning through laughter is a passion for Puff and Dee Dee.

"We believe this program, which has

won awards in the States, is something that is very relevant with kids," Stekler said.

"We believe in the value of teaching through entertainment/education... it's something that children really learn well by."

Puff and Dee Dee, both award-winning professional clowns who've trained with Ringling Bros., learned about the fire safety program while at a convention in the United States.

Stekler said they immediately decided they had to adapt it for Winnipeg and for the past six years have been

taking the performance to kids across the province.

LAFS is a non-profit organization and the performances are free of charge.

Stekler says they accept donations to help cover costs.

The response they've received from educators and students over the years has been phenomenal, Stekler says.

Principals often tell them they appreciate Puff and Dee Dee's ability to take something that can be quite a dry subject and "turn it into something fun", she said.

Heidi Holst, principal at Robert Smith School, said the presentation was great and very engaging for staff and students from her school as well as those from Ruth Hooker and Ecole Bonaventure who attended.

"I kept poking my head into the gym and the kids were still listening and still attentive and for them to be engaged for an hour is quite impressive," Holst said.

Puff and Dee Dee, along with the

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firefighters and Sparky, did a fantastic job with making the presentation educational yet fun, she said.

Stekler said that's the goal and Puff and Dee Dee love entertaining for kids and combining the educational element as well.

"It's an awesome program," Stekler said. "(Selkirk) was so much fun."

Selkirk firefighter and fire prevention officer Dave Milner saw Puff and Dee Dee at a convention in Brandon and contacted them to come to

Selkirk.

Corey Cagne, safety and training officer with the Selkirk department, said they, along with Sparky and Puff and Dee Dee, made their presentation to all K-3 students in Selkirk, with Daerwood students attending the Centennial presentation.

He said though Sparky's the star of fire prevention, Puff and Dee Dee do an amazing job and make the entire experience better.

"Other departments should look at LAFS Canada...along with the whole presentation it's a hit," Gagne said.

He said the department's goal was to get the kids more involved, because they want kids to remind their parents that fire prevention is just one week a year, but they should practice fire safety every day of the year.

Stekler said Puff and Dee Dee put their all into the performances. Puff has been a professional clown for 30 years and Dee Dee for 17. For the LAFS program they've acquired the rights to well known songs - like BTO's Taking Care of Business - and rewrote the lyrics so the song becomes Thinking About Safety.

Educators tell them how well it works.


"A teacher said a week later these kids are still singing these songs," Stekler said.

"That tells us we're on the right track."

Gagne couldn't agree more.


"They'll sing these songs about fire prevention that in turn could save someone's life."

Anyone interested in booking Puff and Dee Dee can contact Stekler at info@lafscanada.com or 204-330-0292.




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