

School becomes grime scene

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Photo Credit: Kris Gonzalez.

Kathy Williams, with EdVenture Children's Museum, enlists the help of a student as she removes stuffed organs from Stuffedee, the museum's gigantic doll.

FORT JACKSON, SC -- Lorenza Cardwell and fellow schoolmate Francisco Pagan were practically skipping from corner to corner of the C.C. Pinckney Elementary gymnasium March 26 as they participated in the school's first health fair.

They had nearly reached the last of four educational booths when they were stopped in their tracks.

"Hands up," said someone behind them.

The students turned slowly and saw a man donned in a white protective suit approaching them.

The man, resembling a character from the television series CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, was actually Kenneth Cobb, a grime scene investigator with the Moncrief Army Community Hospital Preventive Medicine.

Cobb and fellow GSI investigator, Capt. Marla Washington, were there to help educate students about ways to stop the spread of infection.

In a case of "whodunit," the GSI unit pretended to investigate the sudden illness, likely caused by a bacterial infection, of a student at the school.

Cobb and Washington selected some children (the usual suspects) and sprayed their hands with a concoction of fake germs. They then directed the students to put their hands in a detection device used to shed light on the crime -- the crime of spreading grime, that is.

What the black light revealed was small traces of psuedo bacteria in the ridges between the students' fingers and faint rings of make-believe microorganisms around their wrists.

"It's an easy fix with proper hand washing," Cobb said, who later remarked he was impressed by the students' enthusiasm for committing to fight grime and to learn healthier ways of living.

"The kids were excited to get this information to the point that I know they will use this

information," he said.

Allison Plyler, school health nurse, collaborated with members of Fort Jackson's as well as Columbia's health community to arrange the fair, which consisted of four interactive stations to teach students not only proper hand washing, but also good nutrition, dental care and fire safety.

"That's what the health fair was all about - anything that promotes developing healthy lifestyles," Plyler said. "Although (students) learn some of these things in their science and health classes, this way, they can actually see health (education) in action."

Kathy Williams, EdVenture Children's Museum's health education manager, brought her friend Stuffedee, the museum's gigantic doll with removable plush organs, to teach the children about the dynamics of digestion and the importance of good nutrition for keeping bodies healthy from both inside and out.

The Tooth Fairy, Cynthia Good of DENTAC, taught students the proper way of brushing, flossing and taking care of their teeth. In the process, Good taught EdVenture robot Mo (short for Molar) a thing or two about good oral health. Before hearing the children singing rhymes about dental care at the fair, Mo didn't know a thing about toothpaste, fluoride or floss, said Sara McGregor, an EdVenture health educator.

And at their booth, members of Fort Jackson's Directorate of Emergency Services explained to the students the importance of knowing when to call and not to call 911, how to prevent fires and during each session, had one student demonstrate the familiar "stop, drop and roll."

Later that afternoon, the health educators moved the fair to Pierce Terrace Elementary where the younger students there were given the opportunity to partake in the interactive learning event.