



Everyone juggles in Mike Garling's class at Corridor Elementary School. Here the class practices on rings before a big performance.

Distinctive

TIMING



Considered an expert juggler, Alex Hablston can juggle just about anything. Anything includes these two foot-long, razor-sharp machetes.

"Who wants to juggle torches?" a teacher asked 34 elementary school students. A number of hands eagerly went up, followed by a chorus of high-pitched "Me, me, me."

This is a question that would probably horrify a number of parents. However, at Corridor Elementary School on River Road, juggling is part of the daily curriculum.

"We have found that juggling is an excellent way to teach kids how to concentrate on one thing. When they are juggling they have to stay focused or they will drop their objects," said Mike Garling, the director of the program.

The juggling program was started 10 years ago at Corridor by teacher Ken Coleman.

"Ken was killed in a car accident, and I knew the program had to continue because it was so popular with the kids, so I learned how to juggle," Garling said.

Garling said many of the kids are better than him at juggling and have taught one another how to juggle. This is an important part of the program, he said.

Garling said the kids have progressed dramatically in the past few years. The kids who have been involved in the program for three or four years are now juggling machetes and lighted torches. They learn a lot of their tricks through teaching themselves, he said.

The kids at Corridor have come a long way, Garling said. They have performed at the Hult Center every other year and in the yearly Eugene Celebration parade.

Their most notable national appearance was last February in the inaugural parade in Washington, D.C. The Corridor jugglers were the only Oregon representatives in the parade, Garling said.

"I have never been anywhere, and I got to go on a plane to Washington. It was cool," said a smiling 10-year-old Ryan Quesembury.

Beyond the fun the kids have in learning how to juggle, they also learn how to be self-confident through their public performances. They have performed in front of youth groups, Parent Teacher Association groups and retirement homes, Garling said.

"Juggling keeps these kids out of trouble. When they aren't practicing, they are teaching one another," Garling said.

After the children leave Corridor school, some go on to Kelly Da Vinci Middle School. Currently at Kelly Da Vinci, they don't have a juggling class.

Next year it will be different, though. Catherine Webb, a teacher at Kelly Da Vinci school, will be facilitating a juggling class next year and is currently supervising it as an after-school program.

"I don't really juggle, but I'm learning," Webb said. The kids' enthusiasm sparked her interest in putting together the program at Da Vinci.

She said next year she will help students raise money for their expenses. All the ideas and planning for the fundraisers will be coordinated by the kids.

"The money they raise will be used to bring jugglers from the community into the class," Webb said. There is a large juggling community in Oregon, he said.

This large juggling community is quickly growing with every new school year. "Juggling is important to these kids," Garling said.

"Hey Mike, can I take some pins home to practice with," a child asked from across the room.

"Sure," Mike said, smiling. "See what I mean?"



Five-year-old Amanda Hoffman practices juggling scarves, the preferred item for beginners.

Story by Shanti Sosienski

Photos by Anthony Forney



Cathrine Webb shows Nicholas Trebon (in back) and Nicholas Landis the proper method for team juggling.