



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

A barn owl, named Helen, sits with other educational birds at a presentation from Blue Mountain Wildlife during Earth Day activities at McNary Dam on Thursday in Umatilla.

Umatilla, Echo students explore nature in their own back yards

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Sometimes the best way to learn about the Earth is to just go out and explore it. Umatilla students spent Thursday doing that on their annual Earth Day field trip. McNary Heights Elementary School students hiked down to McNary Lock and Dam for a day of lessons and games about nature, science, and conservation. From high school students and scientists, they learned about how animals camouflage themselves from predators, and how trees help clean the air.

A group of Umatilla High School students taught about air, water and land pollution.

"We want to show them how hard it is to get rid of pollution," said sophomore Roberto Lugo.

The students had put together some filters made of plastic bottles, sand and rocks. Elementary schoolers could pour colored water through the filters.

"It should come out clear," said UHS junior Ruben Murguia.

Students also learned about the role trees play, contributing everything from food to clean air. Esmerelda Horn, who works for the city of Umatilla, shared with students the city's effort to become a Tree City USA.

"We need a lot of trees to help us filter our air," Horn said.

Horn told students that at the first Arbor Day in 1872, in Nebraska, one million trees were planted.

Students learned that camouflage isn't just blending in with your surroundings.

Pablo Ames, a UHS junior, was dressed in head-to-toe camouflage, an example of "cryptic coloration," or coloring that helps animals blend in to avoid predators.

He also passed around

photos of a bright blue frog on a brown branch.

"This is an example of 'warning coloration,'" Ames told students. "The animal is using the color on its body as a warning sign."

Students visited stations run by Blue Mountain Wildlife, which rescues and rehabilitates injured birds of prey. They toured the fish collection station, and talked to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers park rangers.

Karen Sheller, a second grade teacher who has spearheaded planning of the event for the past 10 years, said students always enjoy the chance to get out and interact with nature in their own back yard. "They learn about different types of energy, about macroinvertebrates, about things related to biology," Sheller said.

A few miles down the road, students from Echo School learned about trees at the city's 29th Arbor Day celebration. Echo is a designated "Tree City USA," said city clerk Peggy Haines.

There were several Arbor Day stations scattered throughout Echo.

Students heard from Jimmye Turner, a fire prevention specialist for the Umatilla National Forest. Turner drew pictures of different animals to show how fires affect certain creatures, and how they survive.

"A rabbit will burrow under ground, and stay there until the dirt cools down," he told the group of students.

Turner said he works with all age groups, teaching older students about fire in the ecosystem.

A group of third graders gathered in the park behind city hall to do a tree scavenger hunt. They had to identify different types of trees, and collect bark rubbings using crayons and paper, and draw pictures of the trees on the list.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Students unfurl a banner that was presented to them by Oregon Department of Education proclaiming McNary Heights Elementary as a school wellness award winner Friday in Umatilla.

Room to run and food to eat

McNary Heights awarded for school wellness programs

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Nearly every McNary Heights Elementary student shows up to school at 8 a.m., 40 minutes before class begins.

They spend 15 minutes on the playground, then gather in their classroom to share breakfast.

It's part of the "Breakfast after the Bell" program that promotes physical activity and a good meal to start the day, and the Umatilla school was recognized Friday with the statewide School Wellness Award for its efforts.

Through federal grants, child nutrition director Rikki-Larsen was able to secure funding to provide free breakfast for all students in class, which always includes a hot and cold option, as well as fruit and milk.

"I like how we have breakfast in the classroom because the kids don't feel rushed," said fifth-grader Cira Larsen.

The idea, said McNary Heights vice principal Nicole Coyle, is for students to meet before class, share a meal, and get to talk with each other before beginning the day.

"While they're eating, they'll spend time talking about the weekly character traits," Coyle said. "This week, we talked about what it means to persevere."

Fifth grade teacher Maximo Bedolla said he's noticed his students are more alert after breakfast in class.

"It gets the kids more awake and ready to go. Sometimes we'll have conversations about what'll happen that day," he said.

Angie Treadwell, the nutrition education coordinator for OSU Extension Service, nominated McNary Heights for the award. They were one of only three



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Third-grader Gadiel Ferrer looks through his cereal choices at a breakfast station Friday at McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla.

schools in the state to receive the honor from the Oregon Department of Education. The school received a \$2,500 check that will go toward wellness programs.

"Their participation rate is in the high 90s," Treadwell said of the breakfast program. "They make it easy for everyone to participate."

Treadwell noted the other programs that Umatilla School District provides, such as its summer foods

program where students can eat breakfast, lunch and dinner for free at the school.

"That's highly unusual," she said.

They also had a guest speaker, former University of Oregon and NFL player Anthony Newman.

Newman, an Oregon native, congratulated students on their commitment to physical health.

"Your day is like a game," he said. "My first year in the

NFL, I didn't eat before a game in Green Bay."

Newman recalled that he felt lightheaded during the game, and went to his trainer.

"The first thing he asked me was, 'what did you eat today?'"

"And then I got in trouble," Newman said. "You have to make sure you put something in your system so you can perform at a higher level. If you put the right food in your system, it's going to help you take that test."

Newman said it's important for students to exercise and eat right together, like a family.

"You may not even realize it, but you have role models around you," he said.

Students were also rewarded for running the "McNary Marathon," where students over a period of two weeks pledge to walk or run a certain number of laps around the track during recess. The top three boys and girls from each grade were given a certificate and a prize at the assembly.

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