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Photos by Tia Owens-Powers/The Town Talk

Garrick Banks enjoys a piece of apple as Heather Poole, a kindergarten teacher at Nachman Elementary School, asks him to take another bite. The program, titled Kids in the Kitchen, was sponsored by the Alexandria Junior League at the Boys and Girls Club in Alexandria. The event was used to address issues on childhood nutrition and obesity.

Good way for kids to learn about food – play with it

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The best way to learn about food may be to play with it.

Oreos, Snickers and Blow Pops might be snacks of the past, several children learned Wednesday at the Sylvester Street Alexandria Boys and Girls Club during a lesson about eating tasty sweets without calories.

The Kids in the Kitchen program, sponsored by the Alexandria Junior League, taught children how to make healthy snacks, without having to turn on a stove.

Alexandria Junior League member Heather Poole said the program brought awareness to the problem of child obesity.

"Junior Leagues across the nation were holding programs like this," Poole said. "The children learned nutrition facts, made trail mix and participated in aerobics."

Thirty-five children visited four tables, learning how hamburgers and hot dogs could affect their cholesterol.

Porta Bella restaurant owner Denise Wood sat and watched as the children made a sandwich with pita bread, sprouts and honey mustard.

The children also ate fruit and bugs on a log.

Wood asked the children which snack is considered healthier – peanuts or candy. Seven-year-old Darby Dural answered quickly.

"I know peanuts are healthier, because my dad eats them a lot," said Darby, a J.I. Barron Elementary student. "I don't eat a lot of peanuts, but I love the sandwich we made with the pita bread."

Wood surprised the children by letting them know that one fast food could be good for them – pizza.

"Veggie and Canadian pizza has dairy, protein and grain in it," Wood said. "You can't eat supreme pizza because of the pork."

Garrick Banks, a 5-year-old student at Tom Thumb Head Start Center in Pineville, didn't like the thought of bugs on a log for dinner, but he ate it anyway.

The log was celery, covered with peanut butter. The bugs were raisins.



Darion Jones, from Horseshoe Elementary, wears a chef's hat as he is about to bite into fruits on a stick.

"I ate the bugs on a log with the pita sandwiches we made, (and) that's why it probably didn't taste so good," Garrick said. "The pita sandwiches are good because of the honey mustard."

At another table, children sat and learned about the four basic food groups.

A prize was given if a child answered a nutrition question correctly.

Darion Wilson, a 10-year-old Horseshoe Elementary student, said his favorite snack is peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, using wheat bread for the sandwich.

"They told me wheat bread is good for protein," Darion said.

Missy Rubin, an Alexandria Junior League member, told the children they didn't need their parents to be around to make trail mix as a snack.

On a table sat Cheerios, marshmallows, peanuts, dried bananas, pretzels and pumpkin seeds.

Rubin helped 10-year-old L.S. Rugg Elementary student Judson Young prepare the mix.

Judson said he was impressed with



Jerrick Banks enjoys his food so much that he asks to be able to wipe his mouth before being photographed.

the combination of foods. "I'm a big fan of chips as a snack," Judson said. "I didn't think pumpkin seeds would be tasty, but the seeds are actually good."

With all the eating done, it was time to burn off those calories with some cardiovascular exercise.

Premiere Athletic Club trainer Mitzi Fairbanks led children in several exercises.

Children held 5-pound weights and performed squats with the weights held above them. They also were introduced to an exercise ball.

Garrick said the abdominal crunches he did on the ball made his stomach tight.

"Child obesity is a problem, because children today don't go outdoors because of video games," Fairbanks said. "When you get children at this age caring about their health, then this habit will carry into adulthood."

After a long school day, Alexandria Country Day School teacher Kassie Harlow said kids could relax with yoga.

Harlow taught the children several bending motions with yoga.