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Bringing gold

Olympians talk to Cedar Grove students about health program

By Janet Ortegon
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The secret is out — even Olympic gold medalists and record-holders sometimes want to lay on the couch and watch TV.

Olympic champions and Wisconsin natives, speed skater Casey FitzRandolph and runner Suzy Favor Hamilton, came to Cedar Grove-Belgium Thursday to kick off this year's Movin' and Munchin' program for middle and elementary school students.

Additional information

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target="new">Photos:

Olympians visit Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School.

"We think if you have healthy goals ... you can have a few of those lazy sit-on-the-couch days," FitzRandolph told about 800 students.

Both Favor Hamilton and FitzRandolph are honorary chair people of the Movin' and Munchin' program, and go from school district to school district to bring their message of healthy fun to kids all over Wisconsin.

During the hour-long assembly, kids were challenged to run and dance in place, answer questions about healthy eating habits and there were even a few games.

Both athletes also talked to the students about how they got involved in their sport and encouraged the kids to give some thought to setting their own goals.

FitzRandolph asked the students how many of them hoped to become Olympic skaters or runners one day, and how many had goals that were just as important but didn't involve the Olympics.

"We just want to encourage you to have healthy dreams and healthy goals to get there," he said.

Favor Hamilton talked about the first time she ever ran a race — she was in fifth grade — and hearing her classmates chanting her name was the best feeling she'd ever had.

"That was the day I knew I wanted to be a runner," she said. "It didn't come easy. I would've been an even faster, better runner at a younger age if I had eaten better food."

Then Favor Hamilton challenged all the students to give up soda for one week.

"Try this experiment," she said. "See if you have more energy during the day. Could you do that for

me?"

In between games, which challenged kids to choose the healthiest options from among many, and impromptu dance contests, both FitzRandolph and Favor Hamilton repeated their message in different ways.

"We hope that being enrolled in the Movin' and Munchin' program, that there's some carry-through after we leave and from what we've seen throughout the state there is a lot of that," FitzRandolph said after the assembly. "We believe it's happening. Are we gonna affect every kid in every district? No. We'd be a fool to think (that). But if we make an impact in a few of their lives, then in our opinions it was well worth it."

Movin' and Munchin' is co-sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction and the WEA Trust, a non-profit insurer of public school employees.

Terri Albright, elementary school physical education teacher, coordinates the Movin' and Munchin' program every year for middle and elementary school students.

To participate, students keep a fitness calendar, where food choices and exercise are given a value in miles. The goal is for the district to collect 1,800 miles, which is enough to get them to Demopolis, Ala. and back. The school district in Demopolis will be the beneficiary of the book drive done through the district's "Megan's Library of Love."

The program, which officially kicked off Feb. 15 and runs through the end of the school year, has been part of the Cedar Grove-Belgium district for five years. Its predecessor, a program simply called "Movin'" was being used at least five years before that, Albright said.

"I think it's very successful," she said. "I think having two Olympians here is really going to boost our participation. We're trying to get the community involved — parents, staff members. We're trying to make it all-encompassing in the district."

Superintendent Steve Shaw has only been in the district for two years, and is still learning about the Movin' and Munchin' program, but knows large-scale buy-in when he sees it.

"I think it really adds to the excitement because I think everybody goes home at night and turns on the TV see how the Olympians are doing," he said. "To meet people who have act been there, that's really exciting. These people, they put out everything they can into it. They're great role models."
