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Oklahoma City metro-area students learn water safety

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April 01, 2010

When 500 kindergarten students from around the Oklahoma City metro area took turns jumping in the pool at Rose State College March 26, it may have seemed like fun and games. But there were important lessons built into the activity.



The YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City reports drowning as the second-leading cause of unintentional child death in Oklahoma. The YMCA reported 19 children under the age of 17 died from drowning in 2008.

This year, the YMCA hosted its 14th Wee Water Wahoo. The events is designed to get children into lifejackets and into a swimming pool to splash around with lifeguards and learn the basics of swimming and pool safety. Volunteer lifeguards jumped in the Rose State pool, including Matt Franklin, aquatics director for the Midwest City YMCA. He participated for his second year in a row.

“We want the kids to walk away with a positive experience of the water,” Franklin said. “Oftentimes, this is the first time they have actually been in the water.”

Many of the children in the program do not speak English and have never been in a large swimming pool, according to YMCA officials and organizers of the event.

SUITING UP

Before the children suited up and snapped on their lifejackets for 30 minutes of swimming, They spent almost an hour learning about water safety, boat safety, first-aid basics and the proper way to put on a lifejacket. When that was completed, the kindergarteners put on life jackets and prepared to take a dip in the pool. Franklin and the other volunteer lifeguards encouraged the students to hop in one at a time, swim, splash around, and then head back to sit on the edge of the pool. They offered words of encouragement and assistance as the students paddled back and forth.

Most of the students jumped right in, but a few were apprehensive and needed a little extra coaxing and reassurance before getting in the water.

In years past, the event has been held at the Olympic-sized pool at Oklahoma City Community College. Kendra Musick, Northside YMCA aquatics director, explained that it had to be moved to Rose this year.

“OCCC had some last-minute repairs, and we had to relocate,” she said.

In addition to the one-day session, the Midwest City YMCA offers its “Everybody in the POOL” program during the summer along with YMCA branches around the metro area. The program’s four classes teach second graders how to swim and about water safety.

Franklin said the program has been successful and will continue, as grant money allows the YMCA to provide the instruction and transportation at no cost to the schools or the students.