

End of year celebrated at Head Start picnic

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By Nancy Hastings

HILLSDALE — A carnival atmosphere welcomed youngsters for an Early Childhood Community Picnic, held at the Hillsdale Community Action Agency Wednesday.

Hillsdale County Great Start Coordinator Ginelle Skinner said the event is an annual affair that area Head Start students and their families look forward to, with this year's event focusing on a Star Power balloon launch at noon. The launch of more than 500 assorted balloons quickly soared into the blue sky with messages to the community that kids are great.

Amanda Brower of the Parent Coalition explained that each community event statewide was to meet a goal of 300 participants signing a petition for Star Power 2012. "The petition tells our government that early childhood matters," Brower said. "There have already been more than 17,000 signatures collected statewide with a goal of reaching 20,012."

A variety of activities from games to pony rides entertained young children with prizes and ribbons handed out to participants. In addition to inflated bounce slides, the Hillsdale Fire Department brought in its ladder truck for added appeal.

Sharrin Butcher, who works with Head Start as a foster grandparent, said she loved the opportunity to volunteer and looks forward to helping out with the picnic. She passed out ribbons to children who rode stick horses on a short circular track. Head Start teacher Sue Walberg said her niece in Illinois shows horses regularly and donated the ribbons so children could take home an official prize. Families filled picnic tables under one tent and sat scattered on the lawn with their lunches while another tent housed various organizations pertaining to early childhood development.

Mary Boyer Proctor of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Health Department shared information about WIC at one table where she also passed out fliers on Safe Kids and Kids Fest scheduled for June 20. Also popular at her booth were marshmallow popsicles children could decorate with colorful food writers.

Not far away, Cindy Brunner, a provider network development representative, passed out Meridian Health Plan information, bags and crayons. Representing the Litchfield District Library was Edye Macey dressed as a fairy godmother with her dragon "Miss A Lot of Scales Dragon." She meets with Head Start children every Wednesday and will appear at Litchfield's Sweet Corn Days and at summer reading programs. Hannah Sager, 5, listened intently as Macey sang the ABCs in operatic voice.

More children and parents gathered around another table filled with foam arts and craft materials to make bracelets. Those preferring to mix with animals were given opportunity to pet a rabbit, goat, pony, chicken and baby calf that the Waldron FFA brought in for the event. FFA member Tyler Winch, 14, said he was glad for the nice weather and the chance to be outside.

Additionally, pony rides were provided by Saddle Up Buckaroos out of Sherwood. Owner Katie Brodock said this is the second year for her ponies to be part of the event and she looks forward to seeing the kids' faces showing excitement at the thought of riding the animals.

Other attractions, like Gramps Ice Cream Truck run by Gary Scoville, enticed youngsters with treats. Scoville said he is starting his 26th season and has appeared at this event for around five years. Reading Head Start teachers Linda Barnett and Melissa Trott organized a lemonade stand with fresh-squeezed lemonade, while Julie White led a ring toss game nearby. "This is perfect weather," White said. "The kids and everyone are having a great time."



Above, Gary Scoville treated children to ice cream from Gramps Ice Cream Truck at the Early Childhood Community picnic Wednesday. Below, left, a highlight at the picnic was pony rides provided by Saddle Up Buckaroos. Below, right, clowning around while riding stick horses are Jody Schaedler and her daughter, Regan. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTOS

