

DAILY NEWS

HEAD START Picnic celebrates end of year By Nancy Hastings

A carnival atmosphere welcomed youngsters for an Early Childhood Community Picnic held at the Hillsdale Community Action Agency Thursday. Hillsdale County Great Start Coordinator Ginnelle Skinner said the event is an annual affair that area Head Start students and their families look forward to. "Last year it was opened up to the community, so even though the focus is on Head Start, the community comes out to help us celebrate," Skinner said. To help with parking were volunteers from the Hillsdale County Amateur Radio Club. Organizer Don Gambill said the club likes to help out with community events. A variety of activities from games to pony rides and an inflated bounce slide entertained young children with prizes and ribbons handed out to participants.

Head Start teacher Sue Walberg passed out ribbons to children who rode stick horses on a short circular track. She said her niece in Illinois shows horses regularly and donated the ribbons so children could take home an official prize. Early Head Start Supervisor Denise Kerwin said the sunny weather was perfect for the event that included a "Dinosaur Din" of activities including digs in sand and another in a tub of water beads for those 3 and younger. Eldonna Bernath, who works with the Jonesville Preschool as a foster grandparent, said she loved the opportunity to volunteer and looks forward to helping out with the picnic. She helped at the lemonade stand run by Great Start Readiness Program teachers Linda Barnett and Melissa Trott. The ladies made use of used lemon halves by helping children fill them with bird seed, serving as bird feeders. A metamorphosis activity run by Julie White, an aide in Reading, allowed children to crawl through a tube as they pretended to evolve through the butterfly cycle. "We just did this in our classroom, so we thought it would be a fun activity to bring here," White said.

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 flyers on Safe Kids and Kids Fest. Also popular at her booth were flower crafts children could decorate with markers to give as Mother's Day presents. Not far away, CAPA Director Christie Campbell provided an "I Spy" game where children could search for plastic lizards, but actually had more fun hiding them.

Hillsdale Community Children's Librarian Debbie McCluer provided a "Dig into Reading" booth where children could pick up book marks, bat rings and stickers while learning about upcoming summer reading programs. Those preferring to mix with animals were given opportunity to pet several rabbits, a goat, pony and llama that the Waldron FFA brought in for the event. FFA member Jimmy Champion, 15, said he was glad for the nice weather and the chance to be outside to show kids the animals. "They really like it and most of the animals are their size," he said. Additionally, pony rides were provided by Saddle Up Buckaroos out of Sherwood. Owner Katie Brodock said this is the third 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 27th season and has appeared at this event for a number of years. Inside, a group called 3 Generation Twisters of Jackson provided balloon twisting creations. While waiting in the food line, Karla Mullaly, who brought two children to the event, said it was a perfect day. "It's gorgeous," Mullaly said. "The kids and everyone are having a great time."



Petting a pony from Waldron's FFA, Brooklyn Slovacek, 3, makes a new friend at the Head Start picnic. Julie White, an aide from Reading, helps Justin Shafer II, 4, emerge from the butterfly life cycle tube at the Head Start picnic Thursday. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO Copyright © 2013 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved. 05/13/2013