

International Walk to School Day teaches Farmington elementary school students safety, healthy living

By Joshua Kellogg *The Daily Times Farmington Daily Times*

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FARMINGTON — Elementary schools across Farmington joined schools nationwide to promote safety and healthy living during International Walk to School Day on Wednesday.

Events were held at McKinley, Mesa Verde, Ladera and Apache elementary schools as part of an effort by Farmington Walk and Roll to raise awareness about student safety when walking or biking to school. Farmington Walk and Roll, which organized the local events, is a local chapter of the Safe Routes to School program.

A number of "cheerleaders" were at each of the four schools to welcome and cheer on students walking to school. Sandy Schumacher, president of the Farmington Municipal School District Board of Education, along with board members Bill Young and Robyn Hoffman, joined mascots from Farmington and Piedra Vista high schools and Mr. Juan Heart from San Juan Regional Medical Center to provide support and encouragement as students arrived.

At McKinley Elementary, Mayor Tommy Roberts joined a group of students traveling as a "walking school bus" from West Tycksen Drive to the school drop-off point on North Monterey Avenue.

"We want to bring attention to the public that there are a lot of school children on the streets in the morning, and we want to raise the level of consciousness that people need to be looking out for children," Roberts said. "And on the other hand, teach children who are going to be walking to school how to walk safely."

A walking school bus refers to a group of children walking to school with an adult. The program is new to Farmington this year, said Anngela Wakan, coordinator for Farmington Walk and Roll. Locally, a trained volunteer is assigned to walk a group of children to school every morning.

"It has the supervision of an adult with the fun of a group of kids traveling together," Wakan said.

Adrienne Cooper and her son, Chauncey, a kindergartner at McKinley Elementary, were part of the group that walked with Roberts on Wednesday. Cooper said Chauncey walks or rides his bike to school every day. The mom said she believes the exercise is a good way to start the day.

"We're close enough to walk, and it's good exercise," she said.

About 200 students live within a half-mile radius of the four elementary schools and could potentially walk to school each day, said Anngela's husband, Duane Wakan, Farmington's transportation planner.

"We want to promote a healthy lifestyle," Duane Wakan said. "We know San Juan County has a high propensity of children who are obese or have diabetes. We want to get them out and walking."

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