

HOPPING INTO 'LEAP DAY'

Frog expert holds interactive presentation for Livingston students

By Jasmine Hall
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Feb. 29, 2016 marked a special occasion that only occurs every few years — Leap Day.

In honor of Leap Day, Livingston HealthCare staff and fifth-grade students attended an exotic frog presentation by “The Frog Guy” Dan Jellison, a former Billings teacher who holds a doctorate in microbiology and who has been presenting the amphibians to students for the past 31 years.

As part of the school curriculum, students have been studying frogs and their importance in the natural world. East Side School fifth-grade teacher Vicki Schwartz said it was a great interactive experience for her students, and so far, the class has learned about Leap Year, created frog art, interacted with the Watershed Warriors program and heard talks about the invasive Yellowstone bullfrog.

“We’ve been celebrating frogs for two days,” Schwartz said. “... Everything just tied in so perfectly for us. This was so much fun.”

Wearing a T-shirt with his favorite frog, the red-eyed tree frog, Jellison woke the nocturnal rainforest dweller — recognizable by his neon-green, piercing red eyes, vertically narrowed pupils, orange suction-cup toes and blue-striped sides — to expressions of “Omg’s” and “he’s so cute” by East Side students.

“When he was in (the container) I thought he was just like a little toy,” a fifth-grader said of the frog Monday afternoon.

The red-eyed tree frog, the opening frog of the presentation, was the most colorful. Students, intrigued by the rare frog, whipped out phones to take pictures.

“Very seldom do you get to see a red-eyed tree frog,” Jellison said to the students. “It is the most photographed frog in the world today and the fastest disappearing. You may never see it again.”

While the red-eyed tree frog is beautiful, for those looking for a pet frog, Jellison suggests the White’s tree frog, or dumpy frog, a native of New Zealand, Indonesia and Australia, which is known for its smile-like mouth. A molten green color, the frog will eventually change color to a chartreuse green and then, when he

is ready to die, a sky blue.

“This is the frog that will help you do homework,” Jellison said to the class as he placed the amphibian on 10-year-old Wilson Saile’s shoulder. “He will sit on your shoulder for hours on end. He loves humans.”

Jellison said the frog, named Bart, is naturally docile and will come when called.

“It was cool,” Wilson said of having the dumpy frog on his shoulder. “It was my favorite frog because it wasn’t scared of us, and it was just sitting there.”

Next in the show was the South American horned frog, or Pacman frog, named because of their large mouths that allow them to consume rats and mice whole.

“When he opens his mouth, his head disappears,” Jellison said to the class.

The fourth and final frog on the presentation list was the Madagascar tomato frog, known for his ability to puff up when feeling threatened. Jellison explained to students that the frog puffs up using its water supplies and will sometimes urinate to help deflate himself.

“It’s like a squirt gun,” Jellison said as students laughed. “He can squirt 6 feet and hit you on the end of the nose.”

LHC Intern Melissa Cirillo attended the presentation and said she enjoyed the tomato frog.

“I’m pretty impressed that he can pee 6 feet,” Cirillo laughed. “It’s kinda scary.”

Following the presentation, students were given origami paper frogs and a candy gummy worm to train the faux amphibians how to jump.

“My sixth-graders used to love these and made whole families of them,” Jellison said to the class. “We did all kinds of activities with (the origami frogs); in fact, you can do the entire curriculum with them — reading, math, language, spelling, history with them.”

For 11-year-old student Rylan Beye, eating the gummy worm was the favorite part of his day. His favorite frog was the tomato frog.

“It was kinda fat,” Rylan quipped. “I liked how it bubbled.”

Jellison, a Billings resident, said he continues to do the student presentations because of his enjoyment of the animals, as well as teaching students.

“Every frog has a story to tell,” Jellison said after the presentation. “And everybody has a story to tell. So this is my story, and this my story to impact our young people — so that they can understand the importance of frogs in the environment.”



TOP: Dan Jellison holds a red-eyed tree frog at Livingston HealthCare hospital, Monday afternoon. He said its attractive colors help make it “the most photographed frog in the world.” **ABOVE:** A tomato frog puffs up at the sight of people surrounding it on Monday. The frog expands its body by filling up internal chambers with water when feeling threatened.