

Washington Oak students jump at chance for healthy hearts

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COVENTRY — When offered the opportunity to do something to help others and themselves, students at Washington Oak School jumped at the chance.

The students took part in the Jump Rope for Hearts campaign to help raise money for the American Heart Association.

Last week, the Heart Association gave something back to the students, presenting the school a check for \$1,000.

Each year, the American Heart Association offers schools around the state the opportunity to participate in its Jump Rope for Hearts and Hoops for Heart campaign. Those schools that do participate and earn more than they did the previous year are entered into an incentive program for the chance at winning \$1,000 toward products from US Games Company. This year, Washington Oak School was the lucky winner in the random drawing.

Donna Tringali, the youth marketing director for the American Heart Association, visited the school last week to present the award.

Dr. Donna Raptakis, the principal at Washington Oak Elementary School, Amy McGovern, the school's physical education teacher, and all the students at the school were on hand to accept their award.

"The kids were so excited about



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In photo at left, Washington Oak students, from left, Fran Cole, Maria Andritote, Michael Viveros, Alina Stiglet, Brendan Organ, Marc Baglini and Colin Desouza show off their "Jump Rope for Heart" styles. In photo at right, the students join, in back row from left, Dr. Donna Raptakis, principal of Washington Oak Elementary School in Coventry, Donna Tringali, youth marketing director for the American Heart Association, and Amy McGovern, physical education teacher at the school for the presentation of a \$1,000 check the school won in a raffle tied to its participation in a the annual "Jump Rope for Heart" event.

this," McGovern said. "We haven't decided exactly how we are going to use the money, but I know that we are either going to use the money to purchase some new equipment or some more health material. No matter what we use it for, it will be something to benefit the kids."

Although Washington Oak School was the only school to win the \$1,000 prize, Tringali said, many of the schools in Coventry deserved recognition for their efforts in the campaign last year.

Students from the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry, Blackrock Elementary School, Hopkins Hill School, Oak Haven, Western Coventry Elementary School and Fr. John V. Doyle School also participated in the program and raised funds that will help the Heart Association in its efforts to raise awareness and do research.

"We had 130 schools in Rhode Island that participated in the 2007-2008 school year campaign, but we really had an overwhelming response

from the Coventry School District," Tringali said. "The community as a whole is just so generous, it is wonderful."

"Through the efforts of the physical education staff, students in grades K through eight learned the important message of a lifetime — fitness — and helped in the American Heart Association's fight against heart disease and stroke," she said.

According to McGovern, she spends several weeks preparing the students before sending them out to

get donations for their cause. She educates the students about heart disease, about the importance of physical fitness and why it is so important to ward off the disease, she said.

"People may not realize it, but childhood obesity is a major issue and kids can get heart disease, so it is so important to begin educating them at this age so that they are aware and they know how to eat healthy and make physical fitness a part of their lifestyle," McGovern said.