

Program teaches children how to avoid heart disease

By BRAD WEIR
Reporter

The American Heart Association is teaching local school children how to avoid future heart disease through an educational program called the Heart Treasure Chest. Sarah Van Pelt, the regional director for the American Heart Association in Bryan-College Station.

The Heart Treasure Chest is an educational program for loan to day care centers, day care centers and schools that teach 3- to 5-year-olds how to eat and exercise to prevent heart disease. Included in the program are wall charts, cards, a film, song tapes, a stethoscope and cards that visually reinforce what is taught.

Half of all deaths in Texas and one-third of all deaths in the United States are caused by heart disease, Van Pelt said. "It is the number one killer, but many of these deaths can be prevented through education. Adults are fairly set in their ways, but children can start on a positive foot."

To start positively, children must learn how to eat nutritious foods, exercise and rest properly, and acquire the knowledge to maintain a healthy heart, she said.

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— Sarah Van Pelt, regional director for the American Heart Association.

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Thirteen day care centers and schools in B-CS will be using the Heart Treasure Chest during February.

Jane Smith, a St. Michael's Academy kindergarten teacher, is currently using the Treasure Chest. Smith said all of the children actively participate in learning about the prevention of heart disease through exercises, songs and games. They listen to their own heart through a stethoscope and make nutritious snacks, Smith said.

Van Pelt said the program was developed in Texas in 1983 by AHA volunteers and is used by schools nationwide.

"The Treasure Chest does not emphasize the negative with scare tactics, it simply emphasizes prudent living," she said.

"Our goal, by the year 2000, is to be able to say that heart disease is no longer the number one killer," she said.

Because the children involved in the program are so young, the Treasure Chest has five "Heart Notes." These are newsletters to be sent to parents during the heart education program.

These letters involve the parents in the program, and encourage them to adapt their lifestyles to ensure healthier lives for themselves and their children, Van Pelt said.

"The response to this program, from both educators and parents has been great!" Van Pelt said.

"Follow the Yellow Brick Road," a follow-up program to the Heart Treasure Chest, is being developed by Sue Beall, associate professor in Texas A&M's Department of Health and Physical Education and a volunteer for the AHA.

Beall said, "The new program is designed for 5- to 7-year-olds. It's now in the developmental stages. We'll be field testing it in the next few months."

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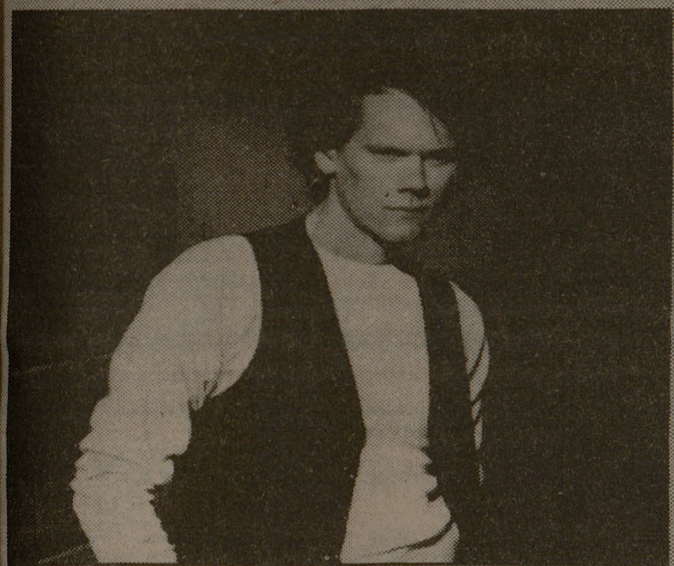
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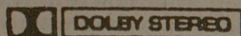
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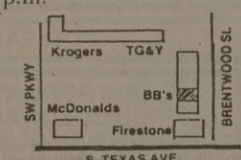
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