

Decorah students celebrate walk to school Event promotes healthy lifestyle

**By LINDA MCALPINE
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Lydia Winklbauer, a fourth-grader at Decorah Elementary School, loves walking to school every day. On Wednesday, she, her mother, Lauren Winklbauer, and the family dog were joined by hundreds of classmates and parents in celebration of National Walk Your Child to School Day. Flanked by a West Bend Fire Department ambulance and fire truck, the long line of students, parents and siblings, many of whom had gathered at a nearby park for an impromptu pep rally, snaked its way to the school, stopping at a crosswalk and carefully looking both ways before crossing.

“It’s so nice to see so many of the kids walking to school today,” said Linda Walter, executive director of the Washington County Health Department, one of the event sponsors. “Even if kids get some moderate exercise in the morning, it helps get them get ready for their school day.”

“I like walking to school, especially now when it is so pretty outside,” Lydia Winklbauer said.

“We walk almost every day, unless it’s winter and it’s really, really cold.”

“I like the walk back home after her school day as it’s a nice time for us to talk about her day.

It’s a very relaxing time and even the dog enjoys it,” said Lauren Winklbauer, who had just walked from their home, along with Foxy, the family’s 6-year-old Pomeranian.

In addition to promoting a healthy lifestyle by walking to school, the county’s Health Department, along with SafeKids Southeast Wisconsin, the Washington County Injury Prevention Coalition, Healthy People Project of Washington County, the West Bend Police Department, Safe-Kids USA and FedEx had something special to celebrate.

Grants received from SafeKids USA/FedEx and Healthy People of Washington County were used for improvements to the front sidewalk and driveway.

A brief ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on the new sidewalk with Principal Nan Lustig.

“We raised the sidewalk and added curbing and tripled its width from 5 feet to 15 feet,” said Dave Wronski, civil engineer for the city. “We also narrowed the driveway in front of school from two lanes to one lane for car traffic.”

The result of the driveway and sidewalk renovations has increased safety for the students.

“When school was dismissed for the day, it was chaos and confusion with kids and cars,” said Rudy Umbs, senior traffic safety engineer with Tindale-Oliver & Associates Inc., Milwaukee.

Umbs attributed the success of the project — from receiving the grants to the final reconstruction phase — to the partnership between all the organizations involved in seeing it to fruition.

Kerry Hanson, a senior safety specialist with FedEx, smiled as he looked out over the procession of cars lined up to drop off students.

“This was such a worthwhile project,” he said. “Before it was done, you couldn’t tell where the driveway ended and that was dangerous for the kids.”

Wronski said the project cost \$32,000.

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[MEDIA]



Linda McAlpine/Daily News Staff

Students from Decorah Elementary School stop and look both ways before crossing the street on their way to school Wednesday as kids across the county took part in annual Walk to School Day.