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Preventing childhood injuries makes a difference



Sunnyside Preschool director Cindy Brengman (second from left) and Fire District 8 prevention specialist Robert Marshall recently received the Rolf H. Jensen Award for teaching the Risk Watch Program to children and families in Lake Stevens. They are pictured here with Washington State Fire Marshal Mary Corso and NFPA Vice President of Public Education, Meri-K Appy.

BY CATHY HERHOLDT
JOURNAL COPY EDITOR

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) awarded the prestigious Rolf H. Jensen Partners in Public Education Award to Snohomish County Fire District 8 and Sunnyside Preschool in Lake Stevens at an awards ceremony held on May 20 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The award is given annually to a partnership between a public fire district and a private sector that have successfully joined together in a fire and life safety education program.

District 8 Fire Prevention Specialist Robert Marshall and Sunnyside Preschool direc-

tor Cindy Brengman traveled to Minneapolis to receive the award, presented to them for their efforts teaching children and families in Lake Stevens injury prevention through the Risk Watch program. Sunnyside's Risk Watch was the pilot program in Lake Stevens, launched in 1998, but thanks to the dedication of Marshall and Brengman, as well as a Cash for Class grant from Fred Meyer and Rubbermaid, the program has expanded into all seven public elementary schools in Lake Stevens. Risk Watch is also taught at Zion Lutheran school. In all, the safety skills learned in the program are reaching 75 classrooms in Lake Stevens.

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Risk Watch addresses the eight leading causes of death and injury to children under 14, including strangulation, suffocation, and choking, water safety, bicycle and motor vehicle safety, fire arms prevention, falls prevention, and fire and burn prevention. A coalition of local fire fighters, police officers and professionals from the Everett Community College nursing program help teach focus classes on each of the topics.

The skills have already saved three lives, Marshall said, including that of two-year-old Zachary who was rescued by Sunnyside student and five-year-old sister Courtney when he choked at home. Although children are not taught the Heimlich Maneuver, Marshall said, Courtney learned it by seeing it demonstrated through Risk Watch and was able to use it to save her brother's life.

Brengman told this story to the huge audience at the NFPA awards and brought tears to the eyes of many there. Both Marshall and Brengman said it was a great honor to receive the award.

Washington State Fire Marshal and NFPA board member Mary Corso presented the award, saying, "This team submitted a very strong application that included substantial documentation of positive educational gains among participating students, based on pre- and post-tests administered by teachers."

Brengman gave credit to the families of her students for helping reinforce safety principles learned at school.

"Family involvement is an important factor in the success of Sunnyside Preschool... While safety is the number one priority at the school, it doesn't stop there. Parents are regularly involved in the implementation of the Risk Watch curriculum at school, home and on field trips to the local fire station, school bus barn and swimming pool..." she explained.

Robert Marshall is now implementing a mentoring program to help establish the Risk Watch program in fire districts in Snohomish and South Everett.