



Ithaca North Elementary fourth grader Seth Capen plays King Neptune (left), waving his magic wand to reveal ocean sponges on the hand of classmate Alex Evans while performer Eugene Clark says the magic words for the trick Monday during an Oceans in Motion assembly. Fourth grader Gabby Ewer (middle) holds a magical starfish bag. (Right) Fourth Grader Josh Capen helps Clark reveal the importance of recycling. The event was part of the school's Reading Month activities, which continue throughout March. (Herald photos - Goff)

Ithaca students enjoy 'Oceans in Motion'

by Erica Goff
Herald Staff Writer

Puppets, games, and an "Amazing" performer taught Ithaca North Elementary School students all about the ocean Monday at a special Oceans in Motion assembly.

Eugene Clark, a.k.a. The Amazing Clark, conducted the assembly, with some help from students in the audience, and helped educate the school about its chosen theme for Reading Month. Youngsters learned all about the ocean, which currently decorates the halls and classrooms of the school, through games, skits and role-playing with Clark and his puppet friends like Hoppy Cous-tau.

"We need to be conscious of what we do with this stuff," Clark said of empty soda bottles found in the ocean, while explaining the importance of recycling during the program.

Fourth grader Josh Capen assisted Clark in teaching students how to recycle and keep the ocean clean. Numerous volunteers from the audience helped fellow students learn important facts about the ocean, such as how much of the earth is covered by water and where the salt in ocean water comes from. Capen told classmates three-fourths of the earth's surface is covered by water, while Seth Capen and Alex Evans declared rocks to be the source of salt in the water.

Seth Capen and Evans also taught about the lost city of Neptune, with Seth as King Neptune,

and the importance of ocean sponges. Students also participated by thinking of their favorite ocean animals, which included everything from barracudas to dolphins to sharks to clown fish.

"Those are the ones with the big red noses and huge feet, right?" Clark asked the audience.

Staff members from the school also enjoyed the show, learning and laughing with the students.

"I think it is going really well. The children are learning some really important information and I think they are enjoying it," said third grade teacher Sally Helwig. "I am really impressed by the way he is holding their attention."

Principal Kathy Paul was also happy with Clark's performance style.

"I like that he is using the students. They are really having a good time," she said.

Clark has a lot of experience under his belt, having earned his "Amazing" title through 25 years of performing in places like Chicago, Cleveland and Kingsville, Ontario, Canada. He studied puppetry with Jim Henson's puppets and has performed on Broadway.

He has appeared on CBS's Late Show with David Letterman, FOX television and was featured on the PBS series Backstage Pass. He currently teaches, draws and paints at the College for Creative Studios in Detroit. Clark is also an award-winning artist and illustrator of the popular children's book "Red Riding Hood Races the Big Bad Wolf" on top of traveling around the state offering various

types of performances.

Paul said the Amazing Clark Educational Assemblies program was chosen as an activity because of its relation to the school's ocean theme for Reading Month and for the supportive references.

Clark's organization offers three programs, each 45 minutes long, for grades kindergarten through sixth. In addition to Oceans in Motions, which focuses on ecology, biology and oceanog-

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raphy, Clark performs Readers are Leaders, which reinforces language arts, and The History of Puppetry From Around the World, featuring puppets from various countries in an effort to make education fun for children.

Paul was far from disappointed with the choice, and students seemed happy as well.

"I am having fun. I like him," said fifth grader Baylie Moore.

Clark was excited about his visit to Ithaca and said he enjoyed his time with the North Elementary students while offering appreciation for their good behavior.

"I love it here. A lot of times the kids have a tendency to be anxious before the show, trying to find out all the tricks," he said.

"These kids didn't do that. They've been very professional and I admire that."