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## Wisconsin Olympians promote nutritious fitness program

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Olympians Casey FitzRandolph and Suzy Favor Hamilton both live and work in the Madison area, but until four years ago neither one of them knew each other. Now they are the best of friends and together they spread the message that eating right and regular physical activity is as important to students' well-being as mastering the three R's.

On Oct. 13, FitzRandolph and Favor Hamilton joined students and staff of the Kickapoo Area School District to stress the importance of a healthy eating through a fitness program for Wisconsin public schools called "Movin' and Munchin".

The program, administered through the Department of Public Instruction and sponsored by the WEA Trust (a not-for-profit group health insurer that insures many Wisconsin public school employees), encourages kids, their families and public school employees to eat healthy and engage in regular physical activity. Schools that participate in the Movin' and Munchin' program may also receive up to \$1,000 in awards for their efforts.

FitzRandolph and Favor Hamilton blasted into the Kickapoo gym with a contagious spirit that had staff and students bouncing off the walls within minutes of their arrival.

Suzy Favor Hamilton

Suzy Favor Hamilton currently lives in Madison, with her husband, Mark, and their daughter, Kylie, but she spent plenty of time in Vernon County when she was growing up. The daughter of Conrad and Rachel (Skundberg) Favor, her mother graduated from Westby and her father from Viroqua. Born and raised in Stevens Point she loved spending time visiting her grandparents, Rueben and Clara Skundberg of Westby and taking in all the activities the Coulee Region had to offer.

"When I was a kid I loved spending time in Westby visiting my grandparents. We loved canoeing down the Kickapoo and my brother who passed away is buried near Brush Hollow. I will always have deep roots in Vernon County," Favor Hamilton said.

Born and raised in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, she won 11 state titles in high school and was named one of the top 100 high school athletes of the 20th century. She became the winningest female collegiate athlete ever at the UW-Madison, winning nine NCAA championships, the Honda Broderick Cup as the nation's top female collegiate athlete and Big Ten Athlete of the Decade for the 1990s. Favor Hamilton is a three-time Olympian and the holder of seven U.S. National Championships.

After winning a foot race in 5th grade, Favor Hamilton was literally off to the races. She quickly became accustomed to the local, state, national and international fame she attained, but her unending success took its toll on her emotional state.

With each race Favor Hamilton competed in she was no longer running because she wanted to, but because she felt she had to. She didn't want to let anyone down, but in her heart she was letting herself down. Running stripped her of her youth and consumed her life with each step she took. Her need to be number one was gnawing away at her so badly that when Favor Hamilton realized she wasn't going to win the gold medal in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, she purposely fell, to avoid the humiliation of having to explain why she lost.

"The truth is I just didn't have it in me, but I didn't want to have to explain that. It was a life-altering moment for me. I felt like I'd let everyone down and it was tough to cope with that. It took time, but I realize now that not winning the gold is insignificant in the big scheme of life," Favor Hamilton said.

Thanks to the support of family and her husband of 18 years, Mark, Favor Hamilton finally has her life back on track and has come to grips with never winning the gold medal. She overcame depression and knows what's really important in life is living it to the fullest, being happy and staying healthy along the way.

Favor Hamilton does motivational speaking and is proud of her association with the Wisconsin Department of Education's "Movin' and Munchin" program.

"When you're healthy and you stay active you feel better and are just happier. Eating right is the key and those habits start early in life," Favor Hamilton said.

Casey FitzRandolph

FitzRandolph is a three-time Olympic competitor in speed skating, won the Gold Medal at Salt Lake City in 2002, and holds the Olympic record for fastest 500-meter in long-track speed skating. He graduated from Verona Area High School and attended Carroll College. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with his wife, Jennifer, their son, Sawyer and daughter, Cassidy Anne.

FitzRandolph started skating at the age of four and set his goals high early on in life. He never strived to be the best, but to do his best, which ultimately helped him become the best.

Exercise doesn't consume his life, but is still a big part of his life. He enjoys hunting on land his family owns near Elroy and tries to work out at least a couple of times a week. The FitzRandolph's don't spend a lot of time in front of the television, but prefer to interact with their children.

"We don't have cable and if we do watch a show like "Dancing with the Stars" we follow their lead and dance right along with them. The kids love to dance with us and we get a heck of a workout during the hour-long show," FitzRandolph said.

FitzRandolph, who has traveled worldwide, is concerned about the complacency of Americans, where obesity has become a real health issue.

"Obesity isn't a problem in other countries. Not like it is in America. People don't have to exercise day and night to lose weight, but they do have to get up and move. We spend too much time in this country blaming our overweight problems on genetics and I just don't buy that. Most Americans simply ingest way too many unhealthy foods to blame our shortcomings on genetics," FitzRandolph said.

FitzRandolph believes children need to be good role models when it comes to eating and the process should start at home and continue into the school systems.

"We are what we eat and we need to eat healthier," FitzRandolph said.

National Health Education Week is October 19-25. Health experts recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise a day, and a healthy diet and fewer than half of Americans meet that goal.

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