



## **Stewie the Duck makes water safety fun** **Nearly 200 AAE students learn importance of being safe around water**

**BY REBECCA HOWES ~ STAFF WRITER**

**APPLE VALLEY** • Drowning remains the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 1 to 14 and the reason why water safety programs are vital, according to Jennifer Eisenbrey, public education specialist for the Apple Valley Fire Protection District.

On Friday afternoon Eisenbrey brought the water safety program, “Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim” to 96 kindergarten and 96 first-grade students from the Academy of Academic Excellence Charter School.

Eisenbrey, along with a Fire Explorer dressed in a duck costume, taught the children — through song, choreography and a book — the importance of being safe around water.

The Stewie the Duck story began January 1, 1989, when Kim and Stew Leonard Jr. lost their 21-month-old toddler in a drowning accident. The event sparked their commitment to do everything in their power to prevent this tragedy from happening to other families. Taking action, the Leonards founded the Stew Leonard III Children’s Charities, which helps numerous organizations with money and support to spread the word about water safety. According to Eisenbrey, the water safety program works because it is a simple and fun way for children to remember the rules by singing along with Stewie.

“Don’t jump in until you learn to swim. Cover your chest with a safety vest. A grown-up must watch you in the pool. You’ll be safe if you learn the rules. Don’t jump in until you learn to swim. Stewie the Duck wants you safe like him.”

After the song, Eisenbrey read “Stewie the Duck Learns to Swim” to the attentive group. The book was written for children ages 2 through 6 and is a child’s guide to water safety. In the book, Stewie wants to swim with the big ducks but is prevented from going in the water until he learns the water safety rules.

For Eisenbrey, who is a mother to three young children ages 5, 8 and 11, this type of program really hits home, she said.

Eisenbrey’s daughter Madelyn, 5, a kindergartner at AAE, was among the 192 students who attended the assembly Friday, and when asked what she learned she didn’t hesitate to say, “Don’t jump in until you learn to swim.”

“You must learn to swim,” Eisenbrey said. “The Civic Center Park Aquatic Center in Apple Valley offers swimming lessons.”

Equally important to learning to swim is to always wear a life vest until you do learn to swim and after that, whenever you go out on a boat, she said.

“The most important rule for children is to always have a grown-up watch them when they are in the water as well as just near the water,” Eisenbrey said.

“It takes just a split second for something to happen,” she said. “If a child doesn’t know how to swim and there isn’t an adult nearby they cannot be saved.”

For more information on Stewie the Duck, visit [www.stewietheduck.com](http://www.stewietheduck.com).

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SARAH ALVARADO, FOR THE DAILY PRESS

Stewie the Duck gives out hugs to kindergartners and first-grade students at the Academy of Academic Excellence after teaching them about the importance of water safety Friday morning.

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