Sun safety: No Fry Day is May 27

Wicked Local Hingham

One American dies each hour from skin cancer, mostly from melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Because of this, the Children’s Melanoma Prevention Foundation is working locally and nationally to raise awareness about prevention and early detection of skin cancer.

As a member of the National Council for Skin Cancer Prevention, CMPF is promoting “Don’t Fry Day,” the council’s annual skin cancer awareness day, to take place this year on Friday, May 27. The council hopes to reduce the numbers of skin cancers in the United States by calling attention to the dangers of overexposure to ultraviolet radiation from both outdoor and indoor sources, and stressing the role of prevention and early detection.

According to Maryellen Maquire-Eisen, CMPF founder and executive director, “the real tragedy is that skin cancer is largely preventable and easily recognizable.” For the last eight years, the foundation has been teaching school children from kindergarten through grade 12 how to safely have fun in the sun.

To date, Children’s Melanoma Prevention Foundation has taught in more than 100 schools, and has reached more than 250,000 children with its SunAWARETM message.

CMPF has created its own “Don’t Fry Day” educational materials, including a new title in its library of sun awareness books for children. “Danger at Graves Light,” is co-authored by Maquire-Eisen and Mary Mills Barrow, creator of the SunAWARE acronym, used by the foundation in its educational program. The book tells the story of a scary day on the water, not in stormy weather, but in full sun. The fictional story is set in Hull and features local sailor/grandmother, Susan Epstein along with her daughter and five grandsons. It has been endorsed by US SAILING, and will be available for use in their junior sailing programs this summer.

The foundation has worked with Hingham High School student Catherine Chittick on her senior project that addressed attitudes and behaviors regarding indoor tanning. Focus groups and student surveys were used to create an educational flier to raise awareness regarding the dangers of indoor tanning. The principal distributed this flier to more than 1,000 people in the school community. “The opinions of the teens and students at Hingham High School were incredibly helpful in guiding me through this project,” said Chittick. “Many students said that if they had only known about the dangers of indoor tanning they never would have done it.”

Recently, the Children’s Melanoma Prevention Foundation joined efforts with other statewide organizations to lobby for the passage of a bill in the Massachusetts Senate to restrict underage access to tanning parlors. In support of this bill, Chittick gathered more than 500 Hingham High School student signatures on a petition that was provided to the bill sponsor, Sen. James Timilty. It was also presented to Sen. Robert Hedlund and Rep. Garrett Bradley who have both indicated that they would support the bill.

Chittick said, “the students’ willingness to sign a petition showed me how much they cared about this topic and also how much they learned about the dangers of this activity.”

The Senior Project Program at Hingham High School provides students with the opportunity to work independently on a project of their own choosing and design. The project allows students to explore a personal interest with the support of school faculty. The project must be approved by the assistant principal and overseen by a faculty advisor. Students devote hours each week to their topic of interest. A final manuscript is submitted showing how the project meets with the mission and vision of the high school. The hope is that the senior project will influence the school community in a positive way.

Senior Project Presentation Night will take place from 6 to 8 p.m., on Wednesday, May 18, in the cafeteria at Hingham High School.