LONG BEACH PRESS TELEGRAM

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LIZARD HAS ANTI-LITTERING LESSON

Character, moral debut at school

Hosts Elizabeth Gordon and Jack Brand, dressed as a lizard, visit Kettering Elementary School in Long Beach on Monday in a debut performance of the anti-littering character for the Long Beach Environmental Services Bureau's campaign. Tracey Roman / For the Press-Telegram

Education: Kettering students first to view fun character to tour district with a serious cleanup message.

By Greg Mellen
Staff writer

LONG BEACH — The Lizard has launched.

Students at Kettering Elementary School were the first to see the official unveiling Tuesday of the Long Beach Environmental Services Bureau's Lunch with a Lizard litter awareness campaign.

Actors Elizabeth Gordon, as the host, and Jack Brand in a full-body lizard costume enthralled and educated students about the importance of picking up litter and reducing and recycling trash.

There was a little apprehension before the first performance among some of the officials responsible for the program, which will tour elementary schools in Long Beach beginning this fall.

"This is our first test run," said Jim Kuhl, manager of Environmental Services. "We'll see if it engages the kids."

Any apprehension quickly dissipated. The kids giggled gleefully when the lizard first poked its head from behind the stage curtain and laughed uproariously when the lizard sneaked in behind the unaware narrator.

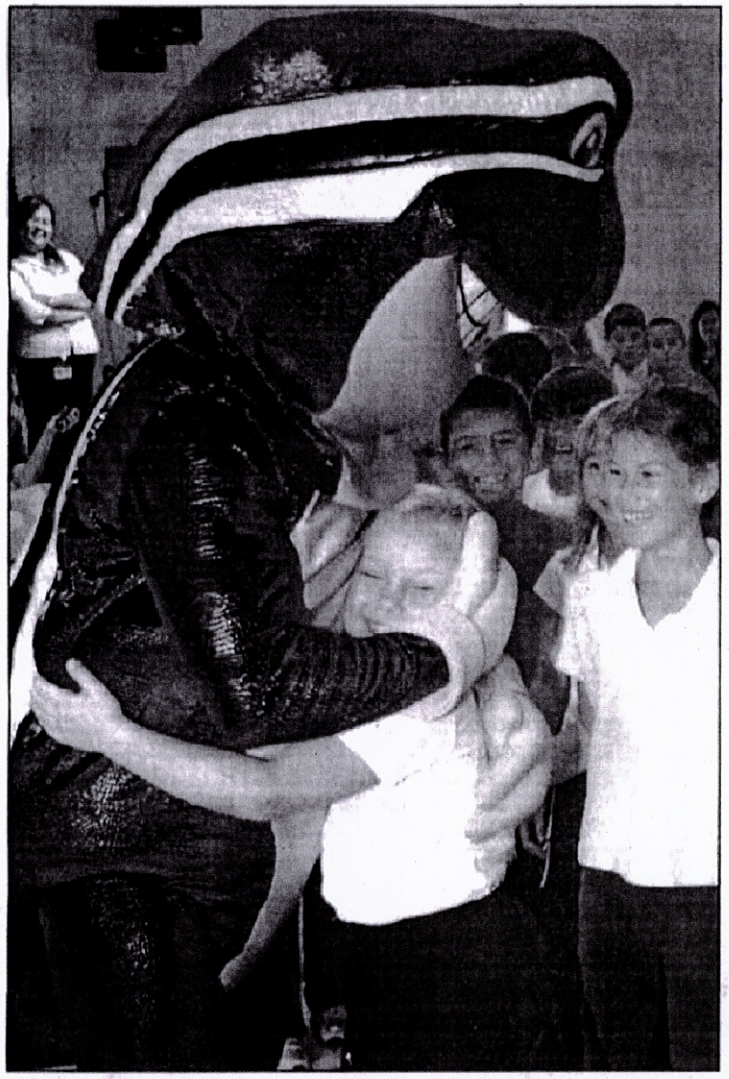
Kindergarten students Jack Lathrop and Synde Lauren both enjoyed the show and said they thought the lizard was funny.

Although the litter-free lizard has appeared at several community events, such as the groundbreaking for the Mark Twain Library, an

PLEASE SEE **LIZARD / A5**

Jack Brand as a Western Skink Lizard and Elizabeth Gordon bring an age-appropriate anti-littering message to students. The visit was a debut performance for the Long Beach environmental program. Tracey Roman / For the P-T

LIZARD: Alerting kids



Kettering Elementary School students hug the Lizard after an assembly in which kindergarten through third-grade students learned about litter. Tracey Roman / for the Press-Telegram

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Ice Dogs hockey game, a reception at the Aquarium of the Pacific and a community cleanup on Anaheim Avenue, this was the debut of the scripted show with a live audience.

The 20-minute performance, one component of the city's Litter Abatement and Awareness campaign, stressed a three-pronged message: to put trash in trash cans; to remind others not to litter; and to remember to reduce, reuse and recycle goods.

In addition to talking about trash and mugging with the lizard, Gordon also gave out prizes to children who correctly answered questions about litter.

The program also provides grade-appropriate teaching tools that support lesson plans promoting litter awareness.

While the delivery may be playful, the litter problem is serious. The California Department of Transportation spends $41 million a year on litter removal alone. According to the Earth Resource Foundation, the annual cost to taxpayers in California for litter prevention, cleanup and disposal is $375.2 million.

As often happens in interactive shows, the children kept the actors alert.

There was the boy who threw off the narrator. When asked if he knew what litter was, the boy answered it was something cats use.

Or another boy who said littering was bad because it was illegal.

And then there was the towheaded boy who, instead of giving the lizard a high-five or hug as his classmates had, jumped and threw a punch at the lizard's nose.

Between performances, the actors reflected on their first performance.

Brand and Gordon are two of 16 professional actors hired to play the lizard and host. They earn between $150 and $200 per show. The budget for the program for a school year is $30,000. The program is to play at all 53 Long Beach elementary schools in the coming school year.

Four more show dates are scheduled this year: June 5 at Garfield Elementary; June 8 at Sutter Elementary; June 9 at Prisk Elementary; and June 22 at Burnett Elementary.

There also will be a contest among the schools to give the lizard a formal name.

Gordon said it was gratifying to not only perform but also teach and pass along an important message.

"This particular issue, litter, is one I'm passionate about," Brand said. "I think the kids get it. They absorb it, and I think it makes an impression."

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