

Students laugh, learn from theater skits aimed at health

By CHRISTOPHER PRICE
Gazette Staff Writer

Eighteen classes of ninth and 10th graders at Taunton High enjoyed "This Is Your Life!" yesterday afternoon, an irreverent performance designed to teach teenagers about the issues of osteoporosis, nutrition and overall body image.

Produced by Foodplay Productions in Northampton, "This Is Your Life!" is the brainchild of Emmy Award nutritionist Barbara Storper and partner Paul Wagner. The two developed the idea in 1995, hoping to reach teenagers with a show about nutrition without sounding "preachy."

"The actual facts about nutrition aren't all that's interesting to kids," said Storper. "What's more important to them is how the facts relate to their lives. So we tried to put the facts about nutrition into a context of a show that's funny, and can relate to them."

"We don't want to preach to them," she said. "We wanted them to come to their own conclusion based on the facts."

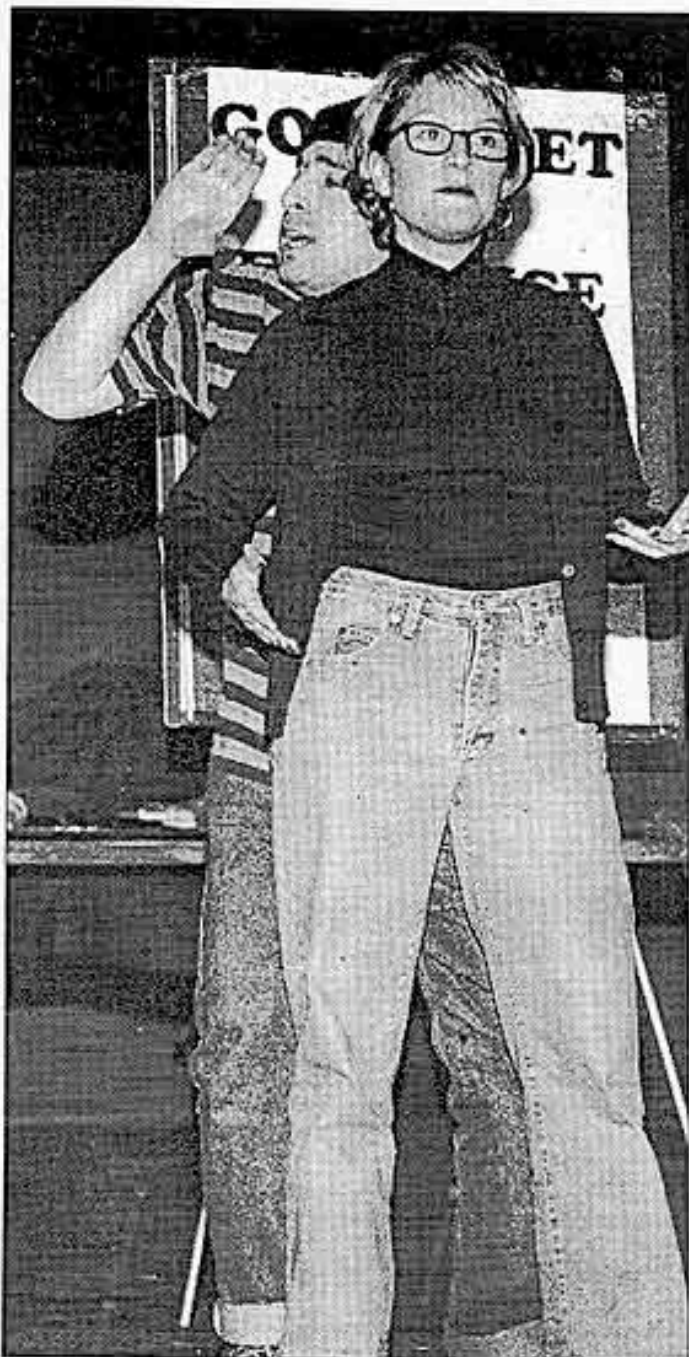
And the facts are upsetting. By fourth grade, two-thirds of the nation's girls have reportedly gone on some sort of diet, believing that they are fat. Up to 20 percent of today's high school female athletes have engaged in bulimic behavior, nutritionists say.

Performers Julie Perkins and Joe Smith illustrated their point using several props, including performing a mock trial against a life-size Barbie Doll.

"A lot of girls want to look like Barbie, but it's not healthy," Smith said.

They also discuss ad messages that they see on TV and newspapers about the importance of being thin.

"It's hard not to listen, because we're bombarded with those images every day," Perkins said.



Gazette photo by MIKE GAY

STARDOM: Joe Smith and Julie Perkins performed yesterday at Taunton High School in "It's Your Life," sending students messages about health-related issues.

"Everybody is different,

and that difference is a good thing — that looking good and feeling good is a function of healthy eating, exercising and positive self-esteem," Storper said.

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