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WINNER OF 12 PULITZER PRIZES

Bucs guard reigns as Lanier Elementary principal - for a day

By Sheila Mullane Estrada, Times Correspondent

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TAMPA — "Good Morning, Mr. Pamphile," a classroom of Lanier Elementary School second graders shouted to Buccaneer offensive guard Kevin Pamphile.

It's the greeting you expect for any professional football player, but it's a bit louder when that player is serving as principal.

At least for a day.

Pamphile and two other Buccaneer team members arrived at the South Tampa school Tuesday morning, laden with boxes of books, flash cards, pencils Legos, educational games and Buccaneer stickers to promote the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Lanier Elementary is the first of about 10 area schools that will be designated in the coming months as STEM program schools where students will be encouraged to develop an interest in studying science and related fields.

"Students who are proficient in science, technology, engineering and mathematics at an early age will undoubtedly set themselves up for a great future," says Hillsborough County Schools Superintendent Jeff Eakins. "Most of the jobs of the 21st century will require this skill set."

As the leader of the Bucs' STEM SQUAD, Pamphile first visited a number of classrooms to build their enthusiasm for the day-long STEM program, co-sponsored by New York-based Athletes for Charity and the Ford Motor Company.

Pamphile told each classroom how proud he was of them and said he had come to, "congratulate you for being such great leaders and to celebrate your learning."



Stretching his arms wide, he asked if the children were "happy" to see him.

They, of course, shouted back an exuberant "yes!"

Pamphile told them that before becoming a Buccaneer he attended Purdue University where he majored in sports science.

"I love science, the whole knowledge of science," he said, urging the children to "set goals" and study hard.

He apparently loves dancing, as well, joining one classroom in impromptu dance steps set to music.

After his classroom tour, Pamphile and his fellow Bucs players, Clinton McDonald and Andrew DePaola (they were Assistant Principals for a Day) met with groups of children in the school media center.

Throughout the day the players distributed STEM-related books and learning materials, led "interactive" STEM games, and encouraged fourth and fifth graders to enter a STEM essay contest.

Participating children were asked to write an essay about the books they received from the players.

Winners, to be announced in about a month, will receive a variety of prizes: tickets to Bucs games, autographed items from Bucs players, Lego products to foster hands-on learning, and field trips to local educational institutions.

While meeting with first group — about 50 kindergarten children — the Bucs players read from Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat" and then gave the children their own copies of the book, as well as other educational materials.

The goal of the STEM program, according to Athletes for Charity founder Cathleen Laporte, is to "invest time and resources" to develop creative ways to promote interest and proficiency among school-age children in science-related subjects and careers.

Enlisting the participation of professional athletes and partnering with companies like Ford is an effective way to help children succeed as adults, Laporte said.

"We want to make it fun and exciting for kids", she said.

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