

Former Celtic a role model

Norris savings program recruits Ernie DiGregorio

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Ernie DiGregorio, a former Celtics player, visits the William E. Norris School Wednesday as part of the Savings Makes Cents program.

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SOUTHAMPTON - As the Celtics get ready for Game 4 of the NBA finals tonight, the timing couldn't be better for a former player to visit students at the William E. Norris School.

How to win a basketball championship wasn't exactly his message though. Dressed in his former No. 7 Celtics jersey, Ernest DiGregorio reiterated a message students have heard all year long: "Savings Makes Cents."

As a pitchman for state Treasurer Timothy P. Cahill, DiGregorio talked to third- and fourth-graders about school, bills and goals Wednesday. When DiGregorio was an elementary-age student, he said he knew he wanted to be a basketball player, but first he would have to save \$20,000 for his education at Providence College.

"Everybody thinks you have to be rich to save money but you don't ... you just have to be smart," said DiGregorio, who played for the Celtics from 1973 to 1978 and was named 1973-1974 NBA Rookie of the Year.

The assembly was held to celebrate the closing of this year's "Savings Makes Cents" banking program, which focuses on the basics of money management. Under the program, the Southampton branch of Easthampton Savings Bank works with fourth-grade students to teach them how to open a savings account and basic budgeting skills. Third-graders were also invited to the assembly Wednesday for an introduction to "Savings Makes Cents," which they are set to start in the fall.

Between shooting layups and dribbling the basketball on the gymnasium floor, DiGregorio asked the students questions like "What bills will you have?" "What does it take to reach your goals?" "Why is important to save money?" The students raised their hands high - some even raised both hands - to answer his questions. After all, saving money is a lesson familiar to them.

Every Wednesday Carol Desrosiers, the assistant manager of the Southampton ESB office, visits the Norris school for students to deposit their allowances, birthday checks and money from the tooth fairy. She meets with students individually in the hallway and gives them receipts for the deposits, which vary from \$2 a week to \$20 a month.

Natalie Beaupre, Kira Kolodziej, Kylie Kolodziej, Talula Thibault and Zoe Ingram, all in fourth grade, were recognized Wednesday for making the most deposits this year.

"A few of them didn't even miss one Wednesday," Desrosiers said. "We like the regularity."

To keep the deposits regular, every fifth week a student makes a deposit the bank gives the child an award - from bank highlighters to money notebooks, to Crayola piggy banks to kickballs.

"As the kids start getting the prizes, other kids are seeing them and that gets them to start to do it regularly," Desrosiers said.