

Our Josh the Otter Program during the Pandemic:

4-27-20

Since schools have been closed here in Alaska since the first part of March, and since we do our classroom visits the end of April and the Month of May, we decided to get creative with our program for the remainder of the year.

Our "Momma Otter", Claire Horton and her husband, Phil own Denali Refuse. In thinking of a way to get Josh out in the Community, Claire started a "Josh Spotter" contest. This is similar to the bear spotting that many communities are doing while schools are closed and people are social distancing. Josh has been traveling around in the refuse truck as they are making their rounds collecting garbage, and if a child spots Josh, they call into Denali Refuse and are entered to win a personal visit from Josh. The first visit, Claire dressed in the Josh Costume and took balloons to the little boy who won the visit. He told Claire that this was the "best day of my life". That inspired her to continue with the program, she gives a plush otter to each winner of the contest when she visits in addition to balloons and other swag. In addition, Josh is now going to visit kids on birthdays when their parents call and request it. Josh traveled around in the Denali Refuse jeep also and was a huge hit in the community.

To get Josh the Otter's message to kindergarten kids this year, one of our PR committee members has developed a digital program and is sending it to all of the k classes in the Mat Su Valley for the teachers to present. It has the reading of the book, and a video of the Josh the Otter learn to float song. Not as good as in person, but we are getting the messages out.

Earlier this year Josh went to Mexico to spread the message of learning to float, never go to the water without an adult and always float with a buddy.

Claire and Phil Horton took Josh to Fairbanks in January 2020, to one of our district clubs who bought a costume a couple of years ago but never got the program off to a start. They visited that Rotary Club, and helped them develop a plan to get the program going.

During the Summer, Josh was present at the Houston Founders Day celebration with books and water safety material for the kids. He rode in the Palmer ,Ak parade , was at the Mat Su Borough Emergency Preparedness event in Sept. , the Alaska State Fair, a YMCA event, and even made it to a couple of Schools before things shut down.

We held Float for Life Classes at the Alaska Club Pool and Wasilla Pool.  
Submitted by Kathy Timm