

# New mascot in town at Rhodes

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WE HAVE 'CLAWS': A new motto was unveiled to go along with the new mascot, an acronym with each letter of the motto signifying something important, such as loyalty and work ethic.

(Herald photo by Jen Cowart)

By Jen Cowart

On Thursday morning the school community at Rhodes Elementary School gathered together for a very special event, one that was the result of several years of effort, much hard work by last year's fourth grade classes and a schoolwide landslide vote last spring.

The school mascot was officially changed on Thursday morning from a tiger to a horseshoe crab, marking a new era for Rhodes, a community which is within walking distance to Narragansett Bay, where horseshoe crabs can often be found.

The efforts to change the mascot into something more relateable for students and something that would impact efforts to educate and help save the horseshoe crab began years ago, when fourth-grade teacher Susan Weber approached former school and district administrators about the possibility of making the change. Ultimately Weber was given a no-go, and she opted to wait another few years before trying again. Last year she approached Principal Erica Stackhouse with the idea.

"I have to say, when Mrs. Weber came to me and said, 'I'd like Rhodes to be the crabs,' what do you think Mrs. Stackhouse did?" Stackhouse asked the students gathered before her during the whole-school kickoff assembly. "I actually giggled at first. I said, 'How can we walk around and be the crabs? I have never seen a school be the crabs before,' and she said, 'Listen to me, I have some stuff to show you,' and I told her if you do the research, have the kids do the research, and come back to me, we'll figure it out.' Well they did, and I learned so much on my own, and here we are. There's been a year's worth of work and now we get to launch our new mascot with lots of fun guests here today."

She introduced Mayor Allan Fung, Assistant Superintendent Norma Cole, School Committee Member Jeff Gale, Director of Habitat Restoration, Wenley Ferguson, local author of "Crab Moon," Ruth Horowitz, Department of Environmental Management biologist Scott Olszewski, and from Save the Bay, Jen Kelly and Meghan Kelly.

Weber greeted the students excitedly and reminded them of the secret hand signal that the school had developed last year, mimicking a horseshoe crab and she had them all show it to her as a reminder. She then told them a little bit about the work that had been done to change the mascot, all stemming from a science class she'd been teaching four years ago which had changed her perspective on the horseshoe crab, which was sometimes perceived to be scary or dangerous, given its looks.

"I learned that they were really cool, and that they've been around for hundreds of millions of years and actually they don't hurt or bite or sting, they don't hurt you, so we were learning about them and we learned that there used to be loads and loads of horseshoe crabs, even in our own neighborhood. Over the last several years there have been less and less of them," she said. "We started to feel kind of sad about that. We had the idea to make our school the Rhodes Elementary School horseshoe crabs, then we'd know all about them, our parents would learn about them our whole neighborhood and the city of Cranston would learn about them and then maybe we could do some things to help the horseshoe crabs not start to disappear."

After being given the go-ahead last year by Principal Stackhouse, Weber and her teaching partner Stephanie Pearson and their fourth-grade students began researching the horseshoe crab and sharing what they'd learned with their peers at Rhodes as well as with their own families and with the PTO. When the schoolwide vote last spring indicated a landslide victory for the horseshoe crab, Weber, Pearson and their students knew that they had succeeded in persuading the school community to make the change.

"The horseshoe crabs won by a landslide, and here we are today," she said.

A video of Rhodes students visiting Save the Bay was shown, and throughout the assembly, many of the students who were in the fourth grade classes last year, read aloud from poetry relating to the horseshoe crab.

Ferguson spoke to the students and how many people had seen a horseshoe crab out in nature. Every student raised their hands. She reminded the students that Stillhouse Cove is the part of Narragansett Bay that is Cranston's shoreline and is where horseshoe crabs can be found, practically in the students' back yards, the females laying their eggs in the spring with baby horseshoe crabs hatching in June.

Author Ruth Horowitz congratulated the students on their mascot change, and talked about how interesting and important the horseshoe crab was, and why it was so important that she made it the subject of her book, "Crab Moon." Horowitz had visited Rhodes to read her book during Reading Week last year.

Department of Environmental Management biologist Scott Olszewski thanked the staff and students for focusing their attention on the horseshoe crab, and noted that he has been studying horseshoe crabs for approximately 20 years, helping to collect and study data regarding the numbers of horseshoe crabs, and helping to institute regulations to help protect the horseshoe crabs. He presented the school a certificate recognizing the school's efforts in helping to protect and promote the horseshoe crab by making it the school mascot.

Save the Bay representatives Jen and Meghan Kelly brought out "Rhodes" the horseshoe crab, an actual horseshoe

crab which had been caught last year in the fourth-grade field trip, and went over some fun facts about horseshoe crabs with the students as they showed Rhodes on the big screen and in person.

In the final segment of the assembly, the CLAWS motto was unveiled to the audience to go along with the new horseshoe crab mascot. CLAWS is an acronym which stands for Compassion, Loyalty, Ability, Work Ethic and Success.

Weber had the students repeat after her, "We are the Rhodes Elementary School horseshoe crabs, and we have CLAWS," as the words and what they stood for were read aloud.