

Critters tell their tale of survival

By Ed Farrell
The Winchester Star

Winchester — Digging dogs and burrowing groundhogs were the stars on Saturday at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum's Story Theater.

Getting the cast together for the 2 p.m. production of "The Three Little Groundhogs," however, took nearly as much time as the play itself, which was a spin-off of the classic children's tale "The Three Little Pigs."

"The idea was to start with a common denominator," said Jan Kirby, program director for the museum who was called into action to play Groundhog No. 2 for the performance. "We work with tales and myths which parents and children are already familiar with."

On Saturday, the cast — Stephanie Schneider, who played both helper and Groundhog No. 1, and Adam Breslaw, who narrated — gave a light yet detailed explanation of groundhogs, their appearance, habitat, and burrows.

Schneider and Breslaw were joined on stage by Michelle Sydnor (Groundhog No. 3) and 4-year-old Salim Bastress of Warfordsburg, Pa., who briefly played "The Predator," which was, in rapid order, a wolf, a coyote, and, finally a dog.

Salim made it through about half the performance before fleeing with a bad case of stage fright. The young actor was replaced by his father, Rob Bastress.

The two dozen people in the audience watched as the various groundhogs, who built their dens out of twigs, straw, and brick, managed to escape from the predator, largely because of wile or because of the construction of their intricate dens, which, except for Groundhog No. 2's, always contained at least two exits.

After fleeing from her own shallow den through an escape hole, Groundhogs No. 1 and 2 were briefly trapped in No. 2's dead-end burrow, having to wait for the predator to tire and go away.





The title characters in “The Three Little Groundhogs” — Stephanie Schneider (from left), Jan Kirby, and Michelle Sydnor — keep an eye out for danger during Saturday’s performance at the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum.
(Rick Foster)

While all lived happily ever after, the audience, parents and children alike, left with more groundhog knowledge than ever before.

The Discovery Museum puts on similar performances every third Saturday of the month, thanks to sponsorship by the Marian Park Lewis Foundation, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Past performances have focused on bats, Mexican wolves, spring peepers (frogs), photosynthesis, and constellations, Kirby said.

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