



PHOTOS BY MACY FREEMAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

The green team, Kryptonite, made up of rising high school students from the Washington region, performed last on Sunday.

Stepping up to show what they've got

Stomping, clapping youths take the stage to showcase skills after Step Afrika! camp

BY MARK JENKINS
Special to The Washington Post

For an hour Sunday afternoon, the National Building Museum's vast atrium took a pounding. It wasn't from mallets, jackhammers or other construction tools. The noise was made by the clapping hands and stomping feet of the more than 100 children who had just finished Step Afrika's "Summer Steps" camp.

Funded and operated by the Washington Performing Arts Society, which has a two-decade history of collaboration with Step Afrika!, the camp has operated for seven years. This is the second summer that the workshops have culminated with a performance at the museum.

"It's a great opportunity to activate this great hall," said Scott Kratz, the museum's vice president for education. Like many established cultural institutions, the National Building Museum is looking to introduce itself to a wider public. The stepping performance, along with a mini-golf course and a pop-up barbecue joint, is



Travon Epps hugs his 9-year-old sister, Dajah Childs, at the performance at the National Building Museum. Dajah was a member of Team Energy, in yellow.

part of transforming the red-brick 1887 landmark into what Kratz called a "town square for this part of the city."

The area around the stage was packed with spectators, and more people cheered

from the second- and third-floor balconies of the massive interior space. WPAS Director of Education Michelle Hoffmann

PET CARE

Putting *what* in Fido's bowl



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE WASHINGTON POST; IMAGES FROM ISTOCKPHOTO

BY TRACY KRULIK

Max was a sick kitty with all kinds of problems: arthritis, bladder issues, recurring ear infections and chronic skin troubles. “Just about everything was a mess on him,” said Andrea Tasi, a feline-only homeopathic veterinarian in Northern Virginia who was treating the 11-year-old ginger domestic shorthair. “Nothing would get better.”

When Max’s owner decided to put him on a raw food diet, Tasi was surprised by the results. Until that time, she had viewed these types of diets — which are a blend of raw organ and muscle meats, bones, vegetables and supplements — as “wacko nonsense.”

Within months of the switch, Max’s “ears got better, his bladder trouble got better, his skin got better,” Tasi said. “You couldn’t make all of his arthritis go away — he was an old cat, so it wasn’t sort of a magic fix for

everything — but this cat looked better than he ever did when he was in my care.”

Animal welfare organizations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), warn that raw pet food is a health risk for animals and the people around them. Yet the diet is growing in popularity.

“Sales are going up and up and up,” says Mimi Stein, retail division director for Ayrshire Farm in Upperville, which manufactures the Furry Foodie raw pet food brand. “It’s almost doubling what it did last year.”

Just as many people are turning to locally grown, organic, whole foods for themselves, they are also seeking out better foods for their dogs and cats. For some, that translates into a raw pet food diet.

According to Max’s owner, that diet is what healed him. “It all made sense to me, because I was kind of playing around with human diets, too,” says Tammy Drodody, a

vegan who lives in Fairfax. “What we eat impacts our health dramatically, so why would that not be true for cats?”

A raw pet food diet is “designed to mimic what an animal would eat if left to their own devices,” says Julie Paez, co-owner of the Big Bad Woof pet store in the District and Hyattsville.

“Our cats and dogs — they need to eat whole prey,” says Terri Grow, founder and president of PetSage, the holistic pet store in Alexandria that recommended a raw diet to Drodody. “There are bones for calcium, there are organ meats for the vitamins and minerals, there are the areas for the fats — it’s moisture. So you have to look at that whole prey and try to make a model of it. Just throwing out a piece of chicken or steak is not a balanced diet.”

Commercially made raw pet food, including such local brands as Furry Foodie and Aunt Jeni’s, comes frozen in tubs, tubes or shapes such as patties. A portion is thawed out in the refrigerator overnight and then served the next day.

PetSage offers cooking classes with recipes shared by veterinarians from around the world. In a class this spring, “we even walked people through a salad that you can make for yourself, and your dog can eat it as well,” Grow says. “It was a good salad dressing, too.”

The ASPCA warns that pets on a raw diet, either homemade or store bought, might pick up a food-borne illness such as salmonella or *E. coli*, become malnourished or injure themselves while eating a piece of bone.

“We are aware that pet parents are often very passionate about what they feed their pets, and with good reason,” says Mindy Bough, who oversees the ASPCA’s pet nutrition and science advisory service. “If somebody feels passionately about [the diet], I’m okay with that, but what I encourage them to do is use very safe procedures when handling raw meat and when cleaning up feces, and then have their animal evaluated by the veterinarian very regularly — at least every six months.”

The AVMA is stricter in its response to the diet and in August 2012 adopted a policy that discourages the use of raw pet food. “Our full concern is the risk to animal health and public health from bacterial contamination,” says Gary Chico, chair of the AVMA’s council of public health and regulatory medicine.

Proponents of the diet say that because dogs and cats evolved eating raw prey, their digestive systems are more hostile to bacteria, so they are less likely to get sick.

“Even if we think that some dogs are able to handle those pathogens better than humans or other [animals], which is debatable, we feel like there’s a risk out there,” the ASPCA’s Bough says. “Even if the animal doesn’t become ill, there’s potentially a public health risk for the people that are around the animals and the people that might be around the animal feces in the yard.”

Tasi always asks about the health of family members before recommending a raw diet. If an animal or someone in the house has a suppressed immune system, for example, “I’m not so sure I’d put them on a raw food diet,” she says.