

# Pupils: Musician Spoke Honestly About Life

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In between presentations, he said he was more nervous to speak to junior high schoolers than to perform across the world with his famous band.

"I love doing this stuff," Gustafson said. But, "Kids are a tough crowd," he explained. "They can spot a phony anywhere."

So, rather than talking about his famous life, the 10,000 Maniacs bassist talked honestly about the side of his life most people don't know.

"When I was in seventh grade, I was a lousy student," he told the kids. "I failed some classes. ... I really wasn't interested in learning."

It took him five years to get through college at Jamestown Community College, he said. And, when his fledgling band went out on the road in 1981, he quit college before finishing the last class he needed to earn his degree.

He went back 10 years later to earn the degree. But, in the years in between, he was part of another success story with 10,000 Maniacs, as the group went from being kicked out of the bar where they first performed, to getting their first break outside New York City.

"We slept on people's floors. We put up tents in state parks," he said, about the time before the group found widespread success. He remembered spending one night on a beach in the pouring rain, sitting in his underwear because his clothes had gotten drenched.

"We were a family," he explained about the band. "We did it because we had a deep love of music. We committed ourselves to it and we kept at it."

When he told the pupils they should "keep at" their own goals, the message came through clearer because he'd crossed the boundary between audience and presenter.

"He's just like me," said seventh-grader Truman Leeper, after listening to Gustafson from across a small table.

"I thought it was weird when he was talking about being on the beach in his underwear," seventh-grader Joanna Grundstrom said, with a laugh from her friend, Katie Magnuson.

Gustafson reinforced the point further. "Everybody's the same. You're all beautiful and you're all smart. You can do anything you want. All you've got to do is try."

Other presenters for the "Brown Bag Career Lunch," as coordinated by Washington's School Home Community Volunteer Program and AM Rotary, had similar messages. Every Tuesday in March, presenters came to talk about "the importance of responsibility, accountability, attitudes, creativity, communications skills, problem solving and being a team player."

Jared Gould, another Washington seventh-grader, explained about the program. "You get to talk to people about their jobs and communicate with them."

Terry Struchen, School Home Community program coordinator, said almost every presenter "focused on the fact that what the students are doing now helps to set patterns for their futures. The presenters have shared how they have learned from trial and error and the positive influences in their lives."

"Not one speaker sold their career," said Washington Librarian Carol Shick. Rather, the program

was meant to emphasize attributes that are important to any job.

Other presenters included Sheila Eaglesome of Kwik Kopy; Bill Briggs, president of Chautauqua Brick; Bob Terreberry, retired teacher, actor and director from the Foster Grandparents Program; John D'Agostino, *Post-Journal* city editor; county Legislator Nancy Bargar; youth activist Ron Graham; and YWCA outreach worker Ron James.

Ms. Schick and Ms. Struchen said seventh-graders came to the lunches on their own initiative. The events were announced each Monday in March. Pupils who attended regularly were sent invitations to come to the special Tuesday event featuring a "mystery guest."

They found out before Easter break the mystery guest would be a 10,000 Maniac.

Ms. Struchen said the program will be offered in the 1998-99 school year also, beginning in October and continuing for a longer time period.