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ERIN KELLY/THE ROCKET

Reptile handler, Tom Kessenich takes his Snakes Alive! exhibit to places like schools, colleges, birthday parties and nature centers. On March 18, he made a stop at SRU and shared his collection of reptiles with students.

Audience members overcome fear of reptiles at Snakes Alive! exhibit

By Amber Wilhelm
Rocket Contributor

Tom Kessenich is living his dream. Kessenich, 49, tours the country with his reptiles in the show Snakes Alive!, a hands-on reptile exhibit, which came to the University Union Multipurpose Room on Tuesday. Kessenich's fascination with reptiles started when he was a boy.

"I loved dinosaurs when I was little," Kessenich said. "When I was 7 years old, I met a garden snake and I was hooked."

Kessenich takes Snakes Alive! to schools, colleges, birthday parties, nature centers and anywhere there are people who want to be entertained and educated.

He said that he brings different snakes with him to different events.

For his show at SRU, Kessenich brought a savanna monitor lizard, a bearded dragon, a Columbian tegu lizard, two types of corn snakes, a South American tortoise, a small alligator, a boa constrictor and a black rat snake, which is native to Pennsylvania.

In the introduction to his show, Kessenich said, "My show is about turning malice and fear into curiosity and fascination."

The energetic Kessenich starts with small lizards and works his way up to bringing out the biggest snake in the show, Billy the boa constrictor.

Jason Lane, a freshman health and safety major, said his favorite part of Snakes Alive! was Billy the boa. But Lane doesn't see himself with a job like Kessenich's anytime soon.

"I like snakes, but I don't like touching them," Lane, 19, said.

Lane's sentiment was not shared by everyone in attendance, however. Audience members clamored to pet the snakes and lizards throughout the show.

Some audience members were more nervous than others. Since dispelling fear is one of Kessenich's main goals, he coaxed the most frightened students in the audience on to the stage to pet and hold the reptiles.

Kessenich said it wasn't the first time he has encountered reluctant participants.

"One girl (in Iowa) was so scared she was shaking," Kessenich said. "So I started by letting her touch the lizard's tail and she worked her way up to holding it."

Kessenich has an analogy for the

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"Kick Butts Week" to help students quit unhealthy habit

By Elizabeth Rekowski
Rocket Focus Editor

The first week in April will give students an opportunity to give their bad habits a good old kick in the butt.

Students looking to quit smoking will be given helpful resources during the upcoming annual "Kick Butts Week." A series of events take place throughout the week in an attempt to aid those who want to stop smoking.

The events will be held from March 31 to April 4 at various spots in the University Union.

"Kick Butts Week" is organized by the public relations campaigns course taught by communication professor Mark Banks along with the help of Pennsylvania Students Working Against Tobacco.

On March 31, there will be an informational table in the Multi-Purpose Room of the University Union for students to get free information about how to quit smoking.

On April 1, there will be a Tobacco Expo in the University Union lobby.

Beth Choike, 21, a senior communication major, is the coordinator for the campaign against smoking.

"We're going to have a lot of displays out (at the expo)," Choike said. "A set of healthy lungs and a set of smokers' lungs will be there so that the students can see and touch."

April 2 is National Kick Butts Day, and throughout the day, free "quit kits" will be handed out to students.

Katherine Massey, an associate psychology professor, is the adviser of the SRU PA-SWAT chapter and is also involved with "Kick Butts Week."

"The kits have tips on how to quit smoking, gum to keep your mouth active—since smoking is a very oral activity—information on how to deal with cravings, how to deal with triggers and a stress ball to help students relieve stress," Massey said.

Massey also said that the ball would help students relieve their stress in a healthier manner, since many



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That's so bazaar!



SAMANTHA CHALMERS/THE ROCKET

Mikaila Laslow, 20, a junior psychology major, browses one of the many tables set up during the Afghan Bazaar that took place on March 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Among the items sold at the bazaar were Afghan jewelry, rugs and purses. All of the money raised from the sales went toward funding humanitarian projects.

Afghan woman helps support civil rights in Middle East

By Melissa McFarland
Rocket Contributor

Women's struggles for equal rights in the United States is a subject that many people are familiar with.

But probably far fewer are aware that in countries like Afghanistan, worse struggles continue to go on.

Fahima Vorgetts, an Afghan women's activist, visited Slippery Rock University on Thursday to give a presentation about the struggles of women in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

She is currently working with the Women for Afghan Women-Afghan Women's Fund to help provide women with the materials they need to be successful.

"I am one (of the people) who raise money (in America) and take it to Afghanistan," Vorgetts said.

Vorgetts has opened hundreds of literacy classes, schools and clinics in Afghanistan to help further the effort for women's equality. She aims to help make women economically independent.

Her hard work spans across six different provinces in Afghanistan, including the Kabul, Laghman, Khost, Wardak, Logar and Herat provinces. In each province, Vorgetts uses money donated from grants and foundations to build schools, bring medical supplies, create clinics, support orphans, build wells, bring clothes and even

start women's co-ops called Shoras.

"I gather women together and work with them from six months to a year," Vorgetts said.

In these Shoras, women learn skills and take literacy classes so they can become financially independent. Women in a Herat Province Shora obtained their own building to use as a workspace. In turn, they earned \$4,500 by selling their products in local markets.

The schools Vorgetts starts are also a big step in the direction toward women's equality. In these schools, girls are taught literacy and other fundamental subjects, as well as how to use a computer. Although it has only been six years since the first schools were formed, Vorgetts anticipates that the girls will go to college, get married and enter the workforce.

In the cities, it's possible for women to have many of the same occupations as women in the United States, such as teachers, doctors or even engineers. In small villages, women have small industries. They develop skills in the Shoras and are able to start small businesses that involve sewing, weaving, making embroideries, salts and jewelry and baking.

Vorgetts said the most gratifying part of her job is when she travels back to Afghanistan and sees that the lives of people

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