

# Frisbee champ urges kids to lead healthy lives

By Lisa Di Gianfelice

*The Sentinel-Review Reporter*

OXFORD CENTRE— Gary Auerbach didn't have a coach help take him to the world Frisbee freestyle championships. He relied instead on his ballet instructor. The Toronto native, who paid a visit to students at East Oxford Elementary School Friday, said he purposely took ballet lessons to improve his Frisbee game.

"It's body control, getting your legs higher and looking better when you spin," Auerbach said.

Ballet not only made him a better Frisbee thrower. Auerbach, 32, actually became a professional dancer from 1987 to 1990 and toured with a German ballet company and the National Ballet of Venezuela.

But Frisbee is his main passion and he's taking the game and his bag of more than 100 tricks on the road to elementary and high school students across North America.

Freestyle Frisbee includes trick-throws and catches, bodyrolls, and juggling.

Auerbach hopes to boost students' self-esteem while providing them with an example of healthy living.

"I want to show them there's more to Frisbee than just catching it. It's a lifelong activity and if they start now they can stay fit. It's a very inexpensive activity," he said.

"It helps with their self-esteem because the kids all say, 'I can't do that.' I take them through easy exercises which they can do."

Auerbach began tossing a Frisbee around when he was 12. He learned to throw at a summer camp and used the disc in baseball and football games.

Two years later, he competed in his first competition.

The rest, as they say, is history.

After competing in several Canadian championships from 1982 to 1985, Auerbach and a friend entered the World Freestyle Frisbee Championship in 1995, held in Jacksonville, Fla., and won it.

Shortly after the win, Auerbach opened his own business in Toronto, Spinning Bees, which provides entertaining and instructional Frisbee programs for all ages.

Auerbach likens frisbee playing to meditation.

"It's just the freedom of movement," he said. "I learned to do the tricks myself,so it's like a discovery. In a way it's a form of meditation because you're focused on a spinning object."

Auerbach's favourite tricks are the big crowd pleasers like rolling the Frisbee along his arms in front of his chest.

"Every time I pick up a frisbee for more than a couple of minutes I learn a new trick, Auerbach said."