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Pinwheels for peace

R-9 event will highlight long-running program

By David Mink

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For the last eight years, peace has been spreading throughout Carthage.

It started at Pleasant Valley, when the school adopted a program called **PeaceBuilders**. Then-principal Sonia Resa loved the program, and when she took over the principal position at Columbia Elementary in 2006, she asked that the **PeaceBuilders** program follow her. Stepping in to take her place at Pleasant Valley was Ronna Patterson. Patterson was quickly enamored by the program, as well, and when she took her current position as principal of Fairview Elementary, she brought the program with her, as well.

Then Brenten Byrd stepped into the Pleasant Valley position. By the time he took over as Steadley Elementary principal this summer, the program had already gotten there.

Last year, the program went district wide. It's now taught in all five elementary schools and the middle school, and **PeaceBuilder** facilitators teach classes at Carthage Junior High and Carthage High School.

The **PeaceBuilder** program teaches kids how to solve conflicts through peaceful means. It teaches through six basic principals of communicating and following the golden rule.

"It teaches them the foundation of peace building so we can create a culture of peace," said Amy Curti, coordinator. "It teaches a common set of language for peace building to the teachers and the students."

How it works

The R-9 School District employs three **PeaceBuilder** facilitators who work with students throughout the district. Unlike in other school districts where **PeaceBuilders** is employed (there are five in Missouri), these employees actually work in the schools on a full-time basis.

"It's an interesting partnership, because we work in the school district and we teach in the classrooms," said Curti. "And we've been very effective with that, because the facilitators are actually working at the schools and get to know the students and the staff really well."

Every month the facilitators help put on two **PeaceBuilder** lessons in each classroom. For younger groups, the lessons focus around imparting one of the six **PeaceBuilder** principals. For older classes, the lessons involve teaching models for conflict resolution.

The facilitators are also on hand for intervention sessions. When a teacher feels his or her class is slipping, the facilitator can come in and address the students and help correct the problem.

The program teaches kids six basic principals for being a peaceful student. It asks students to:

- Praise other people.
- Give up put downs.
- Seek wise people.
- Notice and speak up about the hurts you've caused.
- Right wrongs.
- Help others.

"It takes a good two years for the program to really become ingrained," said **PeaceBuilder** and Spirit Program coordinator Amy Curti. "Once it become part of the school and the typical norm of behavior, we find that the children actually start correcting each other. The number of office referrals go down, and the incidents of fights on the playground and in the cafeteria go down.

"The kids just seem to get along better and play together, and when a conflict comes up they learn how to resolve that conflict themselves."

Pinwheels for Peace

Tuesday, Sept. 21 is World Peace Day. To celebrate, students will be planting Pinwheels for Peace on elementary school grounds across the district.

"It's kind of a neat program," said Curti. "We're collaborating with our music and art teachers to make the pinwheels and learn songs about peace. And then students will take the pinwheels they've made and plant them in the lawns, and as the pinwheels spin they'll take a second to reflect and think about worldwide peace."

For older students at the middle school, Curti said she's encouraging them to think about how they're part of something bigger than themselves.

"They may just be one student planting a pinwheel, but there are 620 students in the middle school," she said. "I'm estimating about 2,300 students in Carthage will be participating. And when you look at Missouri and the United States and the world, there could even be up to five million (students participating).

"So when you put your pinwheel in, it's part of millions that are spinning around the world."

Elementary schools in the district will be holding their pinwheel plantings throughout the day. Fairview Elementary will kick the day off at 8:10 a.m. Columbian students will be planting their pinwheels at 8:30 a.m. At 9 a.m. and 9:30 a.m., Steadley and Pleasant Valley students will plant their peace pinwheels, respectively. Mark Twain Elementary will hold its ceremony at 10:20 a.m., and Carthage Middle School will finish off the day at 1:40 p.m.

"I think our children are learning to be **PeaceBuilders**," said Curti. "There's a culture of peace in our schools, and it's neat to see that that culture is being spread with the children in their homes.

"With Pinwheels for Peace, we'd like that culture to spread to our community, as well."