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June 2, 2004 Willow Glen, California *Since 1992*

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Photograph by Kelly Haehnel

Music Maker: Willow Glen Elementary School second-grade teacher and PeaceBuilders music program director Janice Allen lead students through a concert with a theme about peace, love and understanding.

Songs of peace are timely message

By Lynn Crocker

If a positive attitude is everything, then the second-graders at

Willow Glen Elementary have it all.

On May 25, approximately 80 seven- and eight-year-olds clad in self-made tie-dyed T-shirts gathered to sing about peace, love and understanding. The performance was part of the school's ongoing PeaceBuilders program.

Although this is the first year for a PeaceBuilders-related performance at the school, according to Janice Allen, a second-grade teacher at Willow Glen Elementary, music has been a part of the students' curriculum for many years.

"There is a strong correlation between music and success in math and reading," says Allen, who runs the second-grade vocal-music program and was choir director for the PeaceBuilders performance. "The rhythms and beat help students with math. And learning to follow the words in a songbook helps them with their reading skills."

It was while attending a workshop on the importance of using music in the classroom that Allen hit upon the idea to do a musical performance based on the PeaceBuilders principles of praising people, giving up put-downs, seeking wise people, noticing hurts, righting wrongs and helping others.

"At a workshop, I heard a CD by Red Grammer," Allen says. "The CD is called *Singing Peace* and the words of the songs fit in perfectly with what PeaceBuilders promotes."

The Tuesday night performance consisted of seven songs with uplifting names like "Hooray for the World" and "I Think You're Wonderful." And, each contained important messages. For example, the song "Use a Word" encourages talking through problems instead of lashing out with a kick or a punch.

Selected students introduced the songs, with the lead-ins presented in both English and Spanish.

"Because we are a bilingual school, it was important to have the program translated into Spanish," Allen says. "Plus it was a good way for our bilingual students to work on their English."

Allen says the students have been practicing since February and

were very excited about the performance.

"Kids are extremely uninhibited at this age and love to sing and do hand gestures," she says.

PeaceBuilders is an award-winning program that was developed by PeacePartners Inc., a national corporate team of dedicated individuals with experience working with at-risk youth. This renowned nationwide antiviolence youth program is approved by the federally funded Safe and Drug Free Schools Act. It is a comprehensive community-based program launched in schools that seeks to shift the entire school climate to make a school a peaceful, productive and safe place for students, parents and faculty.

"We utilize a precise set of proven tools to create a secure, schoolwide environment in which staff and students work together to build a positive setting for learning," says Lisa Kammel, PeacePartners marketing representative. "

Kammel says PeaceBuilders boosts academic achievement by increasing positive, respectful, thoughtful behavior, while decreasing disruptive behavior.

"The program works with the school's curriculum. Through long-term practice, peaceful behavior becomes an integral part of the school's culture and increases academic achievement by allowing teachers to spend more time teaching and less time disciplining," Kammel says. "The success stories of the schools which have the program in place are amazing."

The program has been implemented schoolwide at Willow Glen Elementary, with students in upper grades acting as conflict managers for disputes that arise at recess and lunch.

"They have special shirts that identify them as conflict managers, and they step in when they see a problem arise," Allen says.

In addition, they have a stock of PeaceBuilders tickets, which they hand out when they see a fellow student doing something nice on the playground.

