



PeaceBuilders program helps students to behave, mediate

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By Tanna Barry

Standard-Examiner Davis Bureau

tbarry@standard.net

President of sponsor group visited Bluff Ridge, may choose school as model

SYRACUSE -- Fulfilling a girl's dying dream of making 1,000 paper cranes is one of the peace-building activities Bluff Ridge Elementary School students participated in this year.

The school has focused on such efforts for the past four years since joining the national PeaceBuilders program, which aims to create a positive school environment that is productive and safe.

Bluff Ridge is one of 66 Davis district schools and 68 in the state participating in PeaceBuilders, making it eligible to be selected as a national showcase school for the program.

Ten schools will be identified as having best incorporated PeaceBuilders and will become models for program. About 600 schools and 300,000 students participate in the national program.

Michelle Molina, president of PeacePartners Inc., which sponsors the program, toured Bluff Ridge on Wednesday as the first of three site visits in Davis School District.

Molina said the program is an important building block for all schools involved.

"They do the right thing," she said. "We don't always acknowledge enough how important that is."

During Molina's visit to Bluff Ridge, students held a peace-building assembly to discuss their efforts over the past year.

Those efforts included one class completing a project for a girl in Japan who died before reaching her goal of making 1,000 paper cranes.

She had 300 to go.

Another class made scarfs for the homeless, and another raised \$200 for the tsunami victims.

MacKenzie Turner, a sixth-grader, said the peace-building experience is something she will always remember.

"It helps the community and the school be a better place," MacKenzie said. "We don't talk nasty to people, and we try to do the right thing."

The school displays lists of good deeds in peace reports hanging in the hallways. PeaceBuilders not only focuses on good deeds, but also encourages students to show love and appreciation.

"This program is the piece that builds a school climate," said Vickie Jessen, Bluff Ridge assistant principal and Utah's regional director of PeacePartners Inc. "We set a very safe, peaceful environment."

Jessen, who will be the principal at Creekside Elementary next year, said she plans to start the PeaceBuilders program there, too.

Just last year, Jessen estimated that between 80 and 100 Bluff Ridge students had to have interventions for problems with things such as fighting and harassment.

That number dropped to fewer than 20 this year.

"Kids learn to mediate," she said.

Jessen said she thinks the program will continue to evolve as more and more schools see the benefits.