

PHOTO: ELIZABETH BURE



Grove Avenue Elementary School students Anne Woods (left) and Cissy Xiao teach Superintendent Tom Leonard the fine art of origami.

Treasures in the Soul of our Community

LATE IN APRIL, I FOUND MYSELF in the principal's office at Grove Avenue School. No I hadn't done anything wrong; I was just there for a regularly scheduled "touch-base" meeting with the principal, Dr. Cindy Kalogeropoulos. I enjoy touring our schools because I always learn something new, when and where I least expect it. In this stop, the unforeseen lesson involved colorful paper, artistic surroundings, and some unabashedly honest fifth-graders.

On this particular visit, it was a chilly gray day. You remember the spring we had this year in Chicago... temperature in the low 40s, windy, with a cold, wet drizzle. It was one of those afternoons when even high-energy elementary-age students were not crazy about going outside for recess.

That day, "Dr. K," as the principal is affection-

ately known, was proud of a particular project that engaged the whole school community – students, staff and parents. Children in all grades were busy folding 4,500 intricate origami cranes out of brightly colored paper. Their project was linked to a United States clothing brand that helps victims of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami by donating one item of its apparel for each origami paper crane handcrafted by an American child.

Students at Grove were excited to discover the ancient eastern art of origami while also offering hope and a tangible gift to their peers on the other side of the world. According to Japanese tradition, anyone who folds 1,000 paper cranes is granted a wish for good health. Looking into the eyes of the Grove students as they folded the fragile cranes, it was evident they were sending



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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goodwill to countless children their age who had endured unimaginable turmoil.

In her office that afternoon, Dr. K proudly displayed hundreds of paper cranes that were already made and ready for mailing. They were only a fraction of the elaborate birds students had finished thus far. Excitement about the humanitarian project received a needed boost from the chance to work inside a warm classroom while chatting with friends and teachers versus the alternative of an outdoor recess in damp and nippy conditions.

As we walked the hallways, Dr. K unveiled another impressive display of 2,000 paper cranes. We entered Elizabeth Bure's fifth-grade art class, where several children were intently focused on folding. When asked if any students could teach me how to make a paper crane, the hands of six enthusiastic kids flew up and a small group quickly encircled me. I was led to one of the art tables, where the 10- and 11-year-olds eagerly began demonstrating their new skill. As I worked on my crane, I was momentarily distracted by other artistic activity in the room. One of the little girls at my side gently prodded me that this process was tricky and I had better pay attention.

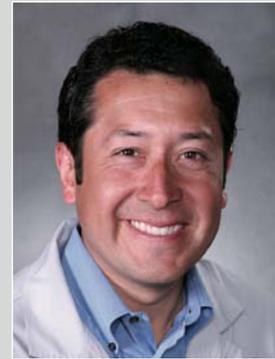
Resuming work on my crane, I felt disadvantaged because my fingers were not as small and nimble as the children who glided through the folding process. I kept making small mistakes.

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Again, my gaze wandered to artwork throughout the room ... ceramics, collages, paintings, photos, drawings. I could discern the singing voices of students in the choral room next door. I thought to myself, "What a dynamic environment Barrington-area residents and teachers have created for their children. We are so blessed to have vibrant art, music and performing arts curricula and programs in Barrington 220. I was reminded of John F. Kennedy's assertion that art nourishes the roots of our culture. Art also reflects the soul of a community.

My daydreaming was abruptly interrupted when the same quiet, little girl on my left, out of character, blurted, "What have you done? That is a mess!" I glanced at my pathetic crane that looked more like a misshapen cat and smiled. A bold boy nearby chimed in, "She told you to pay attention; maybe you should just stick to calling snow days." We all giggled at that. The young girl handed me another piece of paper and, patiently we created a handsome origami crane that more closely resembled its intended subject. As I returned to my office later that day, I reflected on the many

hidden treasures that were discovered.

We are fortunate to live and work in a school district where the arts are highly valued. When the thousands of cranes from Grove Avenue School arrive in Japan and are opened by students there, one child will surely ask the teacher, "Why did they send one deformed cat with the 4,500 cranes?"

The real answer – that a distracted superintendent was daydreaming about the artistic soul of a community – is a surprise only those of us in Barrington 220 will ever appreciate. U