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Area day-school youth boost sick kids' spirits with art

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Bulletin Correspondent

Third grader David Brown of Palo Alto drew a large, smiling sun on his brightly colored greeting card, then composed a short message.

"Dear to whom it may concern, I really really wish for you to get well. The best way to cure sickness is to smile. Smile, and may all your wishes come true. From your friend, David."

The 8-year-old, along with other students at Mid-Peninsula Jewish Community Day School in Palo Alto, was a happy participant earlier this month in a unique program called Project 9865.

The Jewish day school is one of the first in Northern California to join the Project -- a creative art therapy program which will involve 30,000 California school children as well as 4,000 children in pediatric hospitals and oncology camps who are seriously ill with cancer, AIDS and other illnesses.

The children are combining their efforts to paint several huge canvases that will cover what is now an ugly, 15,000-square-foot oil tower on Olympic Boulevard in Los Angeles. The school-children will prime the canvas for painting, while the ill children will do the actual artistic work later.

Project 9865 is named for the rig's address. When completed, it will be the largest monument in the western United States and, at 165 feet, will be thirteen feet taller than the Statue of Liberty. When complete, each side of the tower will depict in colored flowers one of the four seasons.

At the Mid-Peninsula day school, students clustered around the large canvas covering much of the floor in the auditorium. The students, under the guidance of Bernie Massey of Los Angeles, eagerly pushed large roller brushes across the material, applying a base coat.

Project 9865 is the philanthropic brainchild of Massey

and his brother, Ed, an L.A. based artist and author. It is the cornerstone of the Portraits of Hope program. The brothers, who are Jewish, have been using art to promote burning social issues.

Judy Citron of Menlo Park, parent of two Mid-Peninsula students and a helper in the auditorium, heard about the Project from My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum, a traveling museum in the Bay Area.

"The Project goes hand in hand with *Bikur Cholim* --



Julie Harris shows canvas panel to students at Mid-Peninsula Jewish Community Day School.

Photo — Joyce Goldschmid

part of our schools philosophy and teaching -- helping the sick and needy through mitzvah," she said. "It is a perfect connection for these students to help others."

Citron's fifth-grade daughter, Arielle, said, "I thought it would be fun to help children in the hospital. It will make them feel good because other children care about them."

Another student, Max Roth, 11, of Palo Alto, said, "I think this is a real mitzvah and great Project for all the children in the hospital. Hopefully, they will feel better

and happy by getting their minds off their illnesses."

On her greeting card, 8-year-old Laura Cooper of Palo Alto wrote, "Dear friend, You are a brave spirit that should live forever. Get well soon. Keep up the good work."

Recipients of the cards will also receive a kit containing a hat, a wood tower and a set of paints to use on a picture of the tower covered with flowers.

The S.F.-based Bureau of Jewish Education is encouraging participation of its local affiliates through the agency's Family Education Project. Other participants will include Congregation Rodef Sholom in San Rafael and Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco.

Project 9865 has received support from individuals, foundations and corporations.

Bernie Massey, Director of the Center of American Studies and Culture, just finished training 70 Stanford students who will be partners this month with patients at the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital. The Masseys will be in the Bay Area one week each month until the Project is completed next summer. The canvases will be installed in the Fall of 1999.

During a recent meeting of Bay Area Jewish Educators, Bernie Massey and Esther Netter, Director of MJDP Children's Museum, introduced a second project to appear in area schools, synagogues and JCCs. That project, dubbed "youTHink," emphasizes a justice-through-art agenda and Jewish values.

Participants create individual Op-Ed sculpture and write accompanying artist statements. After their projects are completed, they are assembled for a touring "youTHink" exhibition.

For information on Project 9865 and "youTHink," contact Vicky Kelman at the BJE (415) 751-6983.

Project 9865 information: (310) 273-2352 or <http://www.project9865.org>.