

Fall Festival transforms Kimberley Park

Festival unites parents, kids, faculty and community

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

Colorful leaves danced in the wind throughout the city last weekend, twisting and twirling their way to the earth.

The rustling and crunching of leaves under rapidly moving feet has become an unmistakable sign of autumn. The sights, sounds and smells of the Kimberley Park Elementary School's Fall Festival has become another.

Though its name might suggest a more natural setting, the third annual fall festival was held inside the school last Saturday, bringing out hundreds from the surrounding neighborhood.

From its hallways to its classrooms, Kimberley Park was transformed into a virtual kiddie wonderland. A game or activity was set up in nearly every classroom, offering up candy, pencils, pens, plastic jewelry and other goodies to victorious youngsters.

School officials put lots of thought and creativity into some of the games. In one room, for example, kids were faced with the daunting task of extinguishing a birthday candle with a water pistol. The Beanie Baby toss also proved popular. Kids lined up in droves to toss the much-loved creatures into various hula hoops arranged on a stretch of carpet.

Traditional games were not completely left out of the festival. A parent volunteer manned a spirited game of bingo in a tiny, windowless classroom, while the festival's version of the cake walk was staged in the school's media center.

"(The Fall Festival) started as a way to bring parents into the school," said Richard Watts, the school's principal. "Parents get to see that we are here for them and their children, and they appreciate that."

Nestled in a community lined with public housing complexes, churches and low- to moderate-income houses, Kimberley Park Ele-



Parents and students register for the raffle during Kimberley Park Elementary School's fall festival.

Photos by T. Kevin Walker

mentary was a neighborhood school before the phrase was adopted by the school system for its controversial redistricting plan.

Watts talked excitedly about using the festival to develop strong and lasting ties with the Kimberley Park community, ties that will bring parents and other residents into the school throughout the academic year. Kimberley Park officials have already initiated a Saturday academy program for parents. In the program, parents are taught a variety of skills in a series of educational classes.

Watts says parental involvement is paramount, and that he and his staff will continue to develop ways to get parents involved in their children's education.

"The key is to get them in the door," Watts said.

The festival has taken on educational aspects over the years as well. Last year, community agencies were invited for the first time to take part in the event. A countless number of them set up informative booths throughout the hallways, distributing information on everything from courses offered at local colleges to social service programs.

Volunteers from a local health-care agency provided on-site blood pressure and diabetes checks; the



A festival-goer checks out vegetables at the farmers' market.



A Kimberley Park student kicks a soccer ball during a game.

Red Cross also joined the event, setting up a blood drive in a large, open area of the building.

Sandra Pennington talked to an endless stream of parents about the Literacy Initiative, which she calls the best-kept secret of local community agencies.

"It gives us a chance to make people aware of the services that the YMCA Literacy Initiative has to

offer," said Pennington, the program's director.

The Literacy Initiative has a long and successful track record at teaching adults to read. Pennington said that at least three parents showed a genuine interest in getting help through the program, which, she

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