

## Making connections Triangle youngsters raise funds for charity

An elementary school class in Raleigh raised money for charity by staging a play - and in the process learned a lot about their community.

By TODD COHEN

### Raleigh

In the spring of 1995, teacher Terri Stephens' second-graders at Oak Grove Elementary School in Raleigh began planning a class project for the following school year to build on their social studies focus on the community.

Last fall, as third-graders, the youngsters decided their project would be to produce a play and contribute the proceeds to charity.

The result was a dinner-theater production of "Robin Hood" in June that netted \$1,125.68. The funds were split evenly between two charities - Safechild, a child-abuse prevention

agency in Raleigh, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind, also in Raleigh.

The project, which also helped buy a backdrop for the school stage, generated revenues through the sale of tickets, as well as ads purchased by local businesses in the printed program. Stephens also secured grants of \$500 from Carolina Power & Light Co. and \$200 from the Wake Education Partnership.

All the students helped research and select the production theme, and each student researched and recommended a charity to the class. After the students voted to contribute both to Safechild and the Morehead School, representatives of both organizations visited the class. In selling tickets to the play, the students talked about the charities.

The students also staffed committees that wrote an original play based on the Robin Hood tale, handled food and publicity, and produced scenery,

props and costumes.

The entire project, says Stephens, touched on all third-grade academic subjects and enabled the students to see the interconnections between academic subjects, and between academics and the real world.

Kaitlin Anderson, co-president of the class - now fourth-graders at the year-round school - says the project taught her the importance of "working together, because if one person wasn't doing their part, then it would be confusing for the other people."

Scott Simerly, the other co-president, says the project "taught me a lot about how to help our community. Probably in the future I'll keep on helping people."

Katelyn Montague, the student who researched Safechild, agreed: "I learned you should help your community and I think in the future I will keep helping my community."

## Orange Communities in Schools growing

Now in its second year, Orange County Communities in Schools is preparing to expand. The program, which aims to keep youngsters in school, plans this summer to kick off a



Karen Wallace

\$100,000 capital campaign and double the number of students in the program to 140.

The nonprofit serves the county and Chapel Hill-Carrboro school systems. It began at Standback Middle School in Hillsborough and now has added Culbreth Middle School in Chapel Hill.

Karen Wallace, the program's executive director, formerly was youth program coordinator for the

Orange County Dispute Settlement Center and before that, in 1992, was the first Teacher of the Year for the merged Durham public school system.

Marguerite Klein, vice president for corporate communications and marketing for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina in Durham, chairs the organization's fundraising committee. For information call (919) 644-6247.

## NEA FORUM

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son - no Carnegie or Rockefeller - who can do it all, and government budgets are shrinking, not expanding. It is up to the people in their communities to ensure the survival and blossoming of the arts right where they live."

The NEA action plan, based on ideas, opinions and other feedback from "American Canvas," will be published next spring.

Other forums in June, July and October are focusing on aspects of the arts in which the host communities excel. Previous forum hosts were Columbus, Ohio; Los Angeles; Salt Lake City; and Rock Hill, S.C. Forums will be held in October in San Antonio, Texas, and Miami.

Charlotte was chosen as a participant because of its success in using the arts to help boost economic growth.

During the first roundtable discussion, "What Is the Bottom Line? The Arts as a Community Economic Resource," panel members included Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory, Charleston Mayor Joseph Riley Jr. and Maryland sculptor Mary Ann Mears.

Issues raised in the roundtable included the lack of public interest in the arts and the huge economic role that the arts can play in revitalizing a city. Charleston's Spoleto Festival, Riley said, was responsible for reinvigorating the city's downtown area. There are many instances when public support for the arts has been repaid three-fold, panelists said: People are more attracted to an area with a rich cultural environment, and that translates into more jobs, more money being spent, and a greater

## Alexander upbeat about arts

At a news conference July 18 during the "American Canvas" forum, Jane Alexander, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, lamented that the majority of Congress still does not recognize the importance of the arts to community development.

Alexander said she did not think her efforts to educate legislators on the arts had worked.

"I think that if I had fully succeeded, we wouldn't have received the cuts," she said, referring to the 40 percent funding cut Congress handed the NEA in 1996.

But, she added, she hopes that support for the arts will increase in coming years.

"Things are cyclical in our country," she said.

Alexander also said she had been

general interest in the city's heritage.

But it is also necessary not only to show Americans what the arts can do for them, but to have the arts community stand up and fight for its own survival, panelists said.

"The artists need to come forward and lead," Mears said.

Also, the public needs to view the arts as a fundamental portion of their lives, Riley said. The problem is that Americans don't, McCrory said, even though the arts have an effect on everything from education to public safety.

The second roundtable featured panelists such as artist Audrey Flack; William Ivey, director of the Country Music Foundation; and James Borders, executive director of the Louisiana Division of the Arts. Panelists focused on the importance

of leaving a legacy for future generations and the fact that much of the legacy of the 20th century, such as furniture, languages, documents, dance and song, has been lost.

The "American Canvas" program's budget of approximately \$220,000 is privately funded in part by Binney & Smith Inc., Coca-Cola Co., the George Gund Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Sara Lee Foundation. Other donations come from private individuals and businesses in each city. In Charlotte, support for the forum came from First Union National Bank, NationsBank Corp., Transamerica Reinsurance, the North Carolina Arts Council, the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, and the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte/Mecklenburg.

surprised by the large number of legislators who participated in the Charlotte forum. The only other forum in which political leaders played an integral part was in Columbus, Ohio, she said.

"The mayors are our best friends," she said.

The action plan to come from forum feedback will be written in two parts. One part will isolate patterns across U.S. art communities and make recommendations on combating them. The second part will be "the hands-on stuff." The plan will take strategies that worked in some cities and try to integrate them into a blueprint for a nationwide initiative, Alexander said.

Stephanie Greer

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