

Celebrating the 'Month of Kindness' at Valley View

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WATCHUNG – February is the 'Month of Kindness' at Valley View School and one of the leading activities the students completed this month was the creation of a Kindness Tree, where they put up construction paper, leaf-shaped, cut-outs with their printed acts of kindness on them.

"In the mornings the students will reflect on kind acts performed, write it down on a leaf and pin the leaf to the tree," said Valley View Principal Mary Nunn.

Leaves marked with witnessed acts of kindness already placed to the tree's branches range from a father helping his wife put a stroller in the trunk, to someone rescuing another from bullying, and assisting the elderly.

However, the kindness theme is just a small part of a more extensive program called, 'Narratives of Courage.' Narratives of Courage is a school-wide event created to instill critical values in students from grades fourth through eighth.

"When our committee met over the summer, we thought that it would be great to do a character trait each month leading up to 'Narratives,'" said Nunn. "Our committee puts together a kind of learning packet for teachers and once a month the school will extend homeroom. During the extended homeroom, children will either watch a movie, participate in a discussion or read a document on their Chromebooks or read quotes circling the monthly theme."

Some of the monthly traits include service, kindness, respect, sustainability, and responsibility with a focus on social me-



Photo by Kenna Jackson

Valley View School Principal Mary Nunn shows off the 'Kindness tree.' Students made colorful leaves and printed acts of kindness they've seen take place at school.

dia and making the right choices.

Narratives of Courage, which was created back in 2008, is a full-day program where students hear firsthand stories of individuals who overcame obstacles in their lives.

The goal is not only to get the students to be more optimistic and understanding of others but to also have the courage to change the world for the better. Narratives of Courage is geared to instill in children that knowledge that all it takes is one person to make a difference, said Nunn.

Nunn said that she has even seen kids, when they get into high school, later join groups which focus on helping people, giving back or taking care of the environment.

However, having an assembly of students from

different age groups gathering in one spot and expecting them to learn about how to be a better person can be a trying experience. That is why the school discusses these different traits once a month as a sort of warm-up to the main event.

"The stories are amazing but sometimes if you don't build some of these character values, you know, some of it's lost a little bit," said Valley View Guidance Counselor Lauryn MacLeod.

Working the kids up to the main event also provides ample opportunities for the children to get involved. For eighth graders, there is a student group whose job is to plan the Narratives of Courage day.

"The kids really get into it," said MacLeod. "And it's never too early to instill empathy in the children."