

Deer Path Middle School throws party with a purpose

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Fun and philanthropy were the themes at Deer Path Middle School's Pay It Forward Party, which took place after school on Thursday, Feb. 15. Several hundred District 67 students, teachers and parents participated in games, activities and purchased raffle tickets at this social, recreational and charitable event.

Now in its fourth year, this party formerly called Family Game Night, raises funds for charitable organizations. This year Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos, which is Spanish for Our Little Brothers and Sisters, was the beneficiary of all proceeds from the sale of raffle tickets, food and beverages, as well as cash donations.

Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos supports more than 5,000 orphaned, abandoned and disadvantaged children in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

According to event organizer and Spanish teacher Elise Stetson Willis, Pay It Forward is truly a whole community effort of District 67 staff, students, parents and Lake Forest and Lake Bluff businesses. The sponsors were the parent-teacher association, the Emotional Wellness Committee (consisting of teachers and staff), The World Languages Committee (consisting of teachers and staff), Stu-Crew (the seventh and eighth grade student leadership group) and SLS (the fifth and sixth grade student leadership group).

One of the many staff working at the event was



Alexia Akintade (left) and Mary Clara Vlies make themselves desserts at the Deer Path Middle School Pay it Forward night on Thursday, Feb. 15. PHOTOS BY MARK BLANK/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

art teacher Maria Galuzzi doing face painting for a small fee.

"I was happy to do it for a great cause, and will do it again," she said.

Also involved was Spanish teacher Amy Infanzon, who connected District 67 with Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos. When she was growing up, her parents contributed to the organization and hosted some of the children from the organization while they were visiting the United States.

Students played dodge ball and floor hockey games, shot baskets during the free gym time, used a tumbling mat, and played bingo and board games. They were entertained by a magician/balloon artist and could get henna tattoos in addition to the face painting. Local

businesses Sauced Pizza and Suzy's Swirl sold food at the party.

They also had a chance to talk with Meg Brockman, the Midwest development coordinator of Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos USA, about the kids who the organization supports. Brockman was impressed to see kids individually drop money into the donation box because they did it in a truly giving spirit, not to get the attention of anyone.

The students will have a chance to meet some of the Guatemala Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos kids during the "2018 Pequenos Tour" on the day of their March 5 concert at Deer Path Middle School, which is supported by a Spirit of 67 Dorothy Chandler Grant. The foreign language teachers are

organizing lunch for the Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos kids and interested DPM students that day.

Emilie Correa, the emotional wellness coordinator for the district, noted the excitement of the students for this annual event.

"Doing good feels good. You can't teach that. They have to experience it," she said.

This is the first international organization they have worked with, Correa explained. Last year, District 67 partnered with a Waukegan school. Pay It Forward proceeds went to support a book drive for them, and the students took a field trip to Waukegan. On the bus on the way back to Lake Forest, the kids kept asking if they could go back, Correa said.



Balloon artist Al Brodsky makes fun balloons for students.



Charlie Engelberg (left) and Luke Sawant enjoy playing a fun game of basketball during the event.

The party culminated with the raffle prize drawing. There were approximately 50 raffle prize boxes set up, into which the students dropped their tickets during the event. Half of them were innovative "teacher time" prizes, which included lunch, breakfast or ice cream sundaes with a teacher and a few students, a dodgeball game between teachers and students and a movie and popcorn at the school with a teacher and students.

The other prizes were gift certificates from area businesses, which was Stetson Willis's big project. She was thrilled with

their generosity and familiarity with the event, as many have been contributing for all four years.

The donating restaurants were Donati's Pizza, Ferentino's, Graffiti Grill, Grill 43, Jimmy John's, Lake House, the Lantern, the Maevery Public House, the Silo, Starbucks and Subway. The contributing businesses were the Bootery, Bose, Dimitrio's Jewelry, Einstein's Bagels, Francesca's, Fresh Market, Gerhards Bakery, Gifted, Heinens, Jewel, J. McLaughlin, Kiddles, Lake Forest Bookstore, Sauced Pizza, Suzy's Swirl, Sweets and Taper Cuts.