

Art for the Sky

Local kids raise money for schools with colorful display

May 9, 2003

By Janet Cook



A blustery west wind couldn't blow away the elementary school students on Thursday as they assembled on the field at Westside School for Hood River's first-ever Art for the Sky project.

The project involved the entire student bodies at both Westside and May Street Elementary School creating a human art form – in this case, a "picture" of Mt. Hood.

The project, led by Mosier artist Daniel Dancer, required a massive effort in coordination from students, faculty and many community volunteers.

"It just goes to show that when we all cooperate, look what we can create," said Ellen Trichter who, along with friends Suzanne Haynes and Sheila Shearer spearheaded bringing the project to the Hood River schools. Dancer has done his Art for the Sky project at other schools in the Northwest, but this was the first time for Hood River.

Shortly after noon, Westside students began filing out onto the northeast field at the school and were soon joined by May Street students who were bused to Westside. The students all were wearing either red, purple, black or white t-shirts, and made their way to an outline that Dancer had made on the field with each color. Dancer had created the design for the mountain with the help of Westside student artists in March.

When all the students were in their appropriate, color-coordinated spots, Dancer was raised high above them in a cherry picker provided by PP&L, which was parked just on the other side of the school fence on Belmont Drive.

When someone on the ground blew a horn, the kids bent over so their bright-colored backs were showing. Dancer took some photos before being lowered to the ground and heading to the airport for the grand finale of the day.

While they waited, students did jumping jacks and ran in place to keep warm. Despite darkening clouds and an ever-colder wind, the din of kids laughing and goofing around never faltered. And despite some doubts beforehand by teachers that the kids would get restless and unruly, the students stayed in place and were well-behaved throughout the nearly two-hour project.

Finally, the sound of a helicopter was heard, and then it appeared in the sky swooping over the school. The Hillsboro Helicopters chopper had Dancer on board, where he would take the final pictures of the students' "picture" – truly, art for the sky.

The students let out a collective cheer and pointed to the chopper as it circled overhead. The horn was blown once again, and over the kids bent.

The helicopter made several circles, hovering low on one of them. Then, with a few toots of the horn, the kids wearing red t-shirts – the "lava" – ran through the top of the "mountain" and spread out across the field, signifying the mountain erupting. After that, more of the mountain's innards ran through the top, then all the kids began running across the field as the art form dispersed into a scattering of kids running around the school playground.

"The human eruption was one of the most beautiful and amazing things I've ever seen from the sky," Dancer said later. Trichter thought the project showed how "interdependent we are on each other" – which is one of the main lessons Dancer tries to impart with his Art for the Sky projects.

The students' responses to the project were enthusiastic. Westside first-grader Morgan Cooke, who got to erupt with the lava group, thought "going through the top" was the most fun. Second-grader Natalia Ames was less specific. When asked what her favorite part was, she pulled on her purple t-shirt for a moment. "Pretty much everything about it," she said, then ran off across the playground.