

Centerville Elementary students learn about ag through art show

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CENTERVILLE — Although Lancaster County is considered the Garden Spot of the nation because of its outstanding agriculture, a whole generation of students grow up with little or no concept of what it means to be a farmer or to live on a farm. Betty Lou Kauffman, art teacher at Centerville Elementary School in the Hempfield School District, took a giant step in educating the 500 suburban students there when she devoted her spring art show to "Art and Artists in Agriculture."

Even people closely connected with agriculture probably are not aware of the many well-known artists who have rural themes for their art. For inspiration and education, Betty Lou used actual artists for each of the projects she had students create.

The annual art show is held in conjunction with the spring musical and both share a common theme. This year National Agriculture Day coincided with the events, and the result was a massive educational thrust in understanding the agricultural heritage of Lancaster County. And it was not just students who learned; the many visitors to the musical who filled the halls enjoying the art displays also learned about "art in agriculture."

Betty Lou was a natural for promoting this agricultural theme since her husband, Abe, has a farrowing to nursery operation with 30 sows. Betty Lou said, "Living on a farm gave me the impetus, and I had a lot of influence from my husband." She added that she felt these suburban children may have needed the exposure to farming more than others, stating, "They didn't understand about farming and I didn't like some of the comments I heard."

The result of the six-week preparation process for the art show was a much deeper appreciation of farming. "They gained a lot of understanding about what farmers are doing in the fields. Most didn't understand about confinement of hogs and chickens," she pointed out.

One of the sixth graders'

projects was doing pencil drawings of tractors. To provide actual pictures, Betty Lou picked up many brochures at Ag Progress Days last August. In addition to being awed by the tremendous size of the tractors, students got a lesson in economics, since many brochures featured the price. Betty Lou notes, "They could relate it to the price of a car."

To sweeten the interest in the drawing project, Lancaster Ford Tractor donated a model Fordson as a prize. They will also use the display at their store when it is taken down at Centerville later this month. Sixth graders chose from a wide variety of brands and models, and the results are impressive.

In another project, children created farm scenes with crayon animal profiles. For this, Betty Lou described to the children the many buildings found on a farm, and they drew these on their horizons. She commented, "Many children thought there were only barns on a farm. I told them about silos, grain bins, equipment sheds and other buildings."

As part of her graduate work, Betty Lou took a course in architecture and for a final project did a slide program on Lancaster County Germanic barns. This helped children see the variety of barns and understand how they are built.

Weathervanes offered another look at agriculture, and they were inspired by an actual weathervane given to Betty Lou's husband. The weathervanes were created from 35 gauge copper, brass and aluminum foil, and were put on dowels in half pint milk cartons. They are held in place with beads so that they can turn.

At each of the exhibit areas, Betty Lou has used the art of famous artists, and described how agriculture influenced their paintings. It is an education just to learn how Grandma Moses painted sky and ground first, adding as many people and animals as she needed "to fill the picture and make it interesting." Even Marc Chagall, the modern Russian artist, is represented with a painting he did which reminisces about his home on the farm, showing him milking a cow.



Centerville Elementary art teacher Betty Lou Kauffman shows off the pig puppet which became a favorite of the students as they worked with the art in agriculture project. Mrs. Kauffman stands in front of the display which shows the relationship between art and agriculture, and points out that Lancaster County is the Garden Spot of the nation.

One of the most famous paintings on display is Jamie Wyeth's "Pig," and the texture with which he depicted the pig led to yarn pictures by the children giving animals a soft touch. Betty Lou said the children also learned that not all pigs are pink, a lesson in itself which was enhanced with the use of a brown pig puppet which Betty Lou brought from home. "We have mostly Durocs," she said, "so that's why I have this pig."

Yet another area describes the work of Byzantine craftsmen who created mosaic pictures on floors and walls of palaces and temples using gemstones and tiles. This inspired Betty Lou to have the artists create mosaics of farm animals using seeds, another important agricultural product.

Famous Lancaster County artist Charles Demuth received attention for the work he did with agricultural products from Central Market which he used for some of his famous still life paintings. Centerville artists created their own still lifes in watercolor with agricultural products.

American Gothic, the famous farmer and his wife, also inspired the young artists, and could be found in many of the different creations, from weathervanes to landscapes.

Betty Lou explained that every student created something in both two and three dimensions. There were several classes which did sculptures of animals using modeling clay. Some carved animals, and some created stuffed animals. Many of the "models" for



Elizabeth Cunningham, a sixth grader at Centerville Elementary, shows two of the wind chimes made by sixth grade students from ceramic clay. Every kind of farm animal was used as a model by the students.

animals came from brochures from breed associations, and many pigs came from her own extensive collection of pigs. Often the class read books to broaden their knowledge and understanding.

The importance of conservation became a lesson for those who did farm scenes and landscapes as well as for those who created paper mache model farms. Betty Lou said, "I always talk about conservation."

The entire first floor of Centerville Elementary has become a giant promotion for agriculture, and when the projects eventually go home with the children, the educational process will go on.

Betty Lou was pleased with the response from the children, as well as the many nice comments from parents and other family members.

Elizabeth Cunningham, 12, a sixth grader, said that though she lives near a farm, "I didn't know how much equipment it takes." Furthermore, she adds, "My sister didn't know anything about farms, and she came home and said, 'Mrs. Kauffman is teaching us about farming.' She was very happy."

Gerry DiGiusto, 11, also in sixth grade, said he liked the art

projects and he might like to live on a farm, but "only for a week or two. You have to get up earlier." Gerry especially liked doing the tractors, and he enjoyed looking at the small sculptures created by first graders.

One of the first graders, Claire Phillips, 6½, remembered visiting a dairy farm in kindergarten. She especially enjoyed creating oil crayon farmers and landscapes, and said, "I didn't know the colors of tractors." One thing that keeps her from wanting to live on a farm is "all the work."

Michael Dobslaw, 7, was also impressed by the amount of work done on farms. He said, "Farmers have to do a lot of work, and it takes a long time for them to go through the fields." He noted that he would enjoy owning a "special" tractor, one with air conditioning!

He commented cryptically on the show, "I like everything. Nothing's ugly. Everybody did a good job!"

Indeed, everybody did do a good job. "Art and artists in agriculture" not only gave the children inspiration for their artistic work, but also a deep understanding of agriculture which will last a lifetime.

Homestead Notes



First graders at Centerville Elementary School did oil crayon farmers and landscapes based on "American Gothic." Here Claire Phillips, left, and Michael Dobslaw, hold another project of theirs, sculptured ducklings and roosters.