



Mrs. Thompson's 1st grade class during Spirit Wednesday

Photo Jean Follmer

How Does Springhill Elementary Pay It Forward?

By Jean Follmer

Seven years ago, Springhill Elementary implemented its Pay It Forward (PIF) program. If you're not familiar with the book "Pay It Forward" by Catherine Ryan Hyde, the premise is, "Think of an idea for world change and put it into action." Principal Bruce Wodhams said Springhill tries "to create a culture of giving, often anonymously." Springhill does this on local, national and international fronts.

After September 11, Springhill worked with the Red Cross to benefit the New York Police Department and the Fire Department New York. Springhill supports Trust in Education/ Budd MacKenzie to fulfill needs like education, healthcare and infrastructure in Lalander, Afghanistan. When Concord's Holbrook Elementary fell victim to fire and vandalism, Springhill raised funds to help rebuild their gymnasium and play structure.

At the beginning of each school year, staff chooses a new PIF theme. The current year's theme is "Gratitude and Caring." Last year's theme was "Kindness and Appreciation." Within the theme is a monthly Spirit Reminder. For December, the Spirit Reminder is "Show gratitude and caring by reaching out to those in need." Wodhams said the "student council holds a fundraiser before winter break" each year. In past years, they've helped homeless shelters and others. This year, the kids decided to help Save the Bay clean up the oil spill and are holding a Jamba Juice sale. All proceeds will go to Save the Bay.

Other current Springhill efforts include collecting food for the Contra Costa Food Bank, Girl Scout Troop #814 is collecting toiletries for the needy and Girl Scout Troop #1116 is collecting LMYA soccer uniforms for Africa. Last year they collected over 600 soccer jerseys and sent them to a village in Kenya. Springhill experienced the direct benefits of PIF when Girl Scout Troop #519 volunteered hours of weeding, planting and gardening on the campus. Some other annual fundraisers include Coins for a Cure, Pennies for Patients, Animal Rescue Foundation and the Zane Melmed Memorial Fund.

PIF is reinforced daily and PIF acts are recognized at Spirit Wednesday and in the weekly student and parent bulletins. Each

Wednesday, the entire school (many wearing Springhill Spirit Wear) gathers by the flagpole for Spirit Wednesday. A different class is featured each week to lead the Pledge of Allegiance and give examples of PIF. A recent Wednesday featured Mrs. Thompson's 1st grade class. When asked for an example, Nick Catalanello said "Be nice to your teachers and your family." When later asked what PIF meant, Lizzy Follmer said "It's really mean to be mean and you should do what's right."

The PIF efforts of individuals "remain anonymous in order to promote the altruistic and selfless nature of the act." Wodhams believes it's critical to begin this type of character building in kindergarten. He said, "If high school is their first exposure (to these types of acts) it's not something that's just part of their fiber." He went on to say, "When they leave here, I like for it to be second nature to give back."