

## ‘Lost and Found’ Bins Recurrent Problem for Schools

By Chris Lavin



Lost and Found at Del Rey

Photo Andy Scheck

**S**weetie, where’s your jacket?

It’s a question that has been asked in hundreds of Lamorinda households in the morning before school throughout the school year, and the sad reality is, simply, that there is no jacket. It has been lost.

As the weather changes, it’s natural for students to go to school with multiple layers of clothing, and just as natural for them to begin to shed those layers as the day gets warmer. On a recent afternoon, the wall by the recreation area at Sleepy Hollow Elementary School in Orinda stretched for yards – and yards – and yards, covered with “lost” items waiting to be spotted by their owners after school. Jackets, hats, sweatshirts, T-shirts and scarves draped the wall.

Carolyn Orlick, a parent volunteer at Stanley Middle School, alternates lost-and-found duty with fellow volunteer Farrel Vance. “Every other month, I would say I take away about two full, large garbage bags. Let me give you the size,” she said, pausing to think, and laughed. “You know those giant 45-gallon Kirkland lawn and garden bags? That’s what we use.”

While every school encourages parents to put their child’s name and even phone number inside each article of clothing, most don’t.

“I would say 85 percent of the clothing we get doesn’t have a name,” said Cheryl Collins, a kindergarten teacher at Del Rey School in Orinda, who coordinates the lost-and-found efforts with fellow teacher Sandy Buskirk and the student council. “I think parents clubs should sell those iron-on labels to use.”

A person answering the phone at Del Rey described the lost and found bin as “impressive in volume as it is in variety.” Usually it is kept well supplied by “Mr. Steve” Edyman, who sweeps across the fields on a daily basis.

Found throughout the year at area schools: Baseball gloves, pirate hats, lunch boxes, chairs (yes, chairs, left behind by parents after sporting events), sunglasses, scooters, single shoes and pairs of shoes – just about everything.

“You name it, it’s been in our lost and found,” Collins said.

All schools attempt to find the owner if the item is labeled. At Wagner Ranch Elementary in Orinda, the problem is exacerbated.

“We have many, many students from other schools who use our fields,” said Debbie Wong, school secretary. “We always ask that the name is on everything, and sometimes I will find a name from a student from another school, and we do our best to get it back to them. But if I can’t find the owner, I can’t find the owner.”

Depending on the school, unclaimed items end up at a variety of places. At Burton Valley Elementary School, school personnel spread lost items out on tables, said Kathleen Comstock, office manager. After that, it goes to a homeless outreach center in Concord.

At Stanley, a former parent had a sister who taught a class of mostly low-income students in Richmond, and extra jackets and sweatshirts went there. Collins recalls working with a teacher in Oakland whose students needed jackets and he would open a “store” every month at which students could trade in trash they picked up in the neighborhood for clothing.

By far the most popular item cramming the lost bins are sweatshirts, with jackets being a close second. And are girls or boys the most likely culprits to leave something behind?

“I would think it’s mostly boys,” said Wong. “Yes, boys.”