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Saklan Kindergartners Learn the 'Art' of Giving at Special Event

Submitted by Erin Cooley



Saklan School kindergarten teacher Amy Burnett smiles with student Ryan Lo in front of artwork at a recent auction. Photo provided

Part of kindergarten teacher Amy Burnett's teaching philosophy at The Saklan School in Moraga centers around making art a major component in her lesson plan. She does this because she believes art is a great equalizer, and no matter what a child's skill may be academically, they can always express themselves through art.

Six years ago, when Burnett was evaluating her curriculum, she added a level of social consciousness to it. A parent at Saklan introduced Burnett to the Nicholas Colby Fund (Nicholascolbyfund.org), which helps children with cancer by filling backpacks with books, toys, and games to keep them entertained during their hospital stays. She decided to have her kindergartners make original art pieces, and put on an auction Dec. 12 and 13 to benefit the fund. Burnett then takes the children on a field trip to a local toy store, and using proceeds from the art show, students pick out the toys and games to fill the backpacks for the sick children.

The first year that she did this, she was stunned by the grace and compassion the children showed. These little 5- and 6-year-olds were in a toy store, during the holidays, and not one of them was looking for anything for themselves, said Saklan parent Erin Cooley. "They were pure in their thoughts like, 'What would make me smile if I were sick?' and 'What can I choose to make someone feel better?'" she said. "The parents that witnessed this the first year were smiling from ear to ear. And, each year since, it has been even more overwhelming."

There have been years where people make extra donations, beyond purchasing the art, just so the children can give more to the fund, and there have even been other children in the school who purchase art from the show with

their own allowance money, Cooley said. "In a word, it's magical."

Burnett says that "children are never too young to make a difference."

"When we are mindful, we pay attention," Burnett told her students. "When we are mindful, it is quite simple to be grateful. How lucky are we all to be a part of this event; to be part of this simple lesson of compassion and joy?"

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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