DEARBORN

28th annual DPS Empty Bowls showcases student-made ceramics while raising money to help combat food insecurity

Whitmore-Bolles Elementary School students Caroline Jezewski (left), 9, and her sister Eleanore, 9, at the Dearborn Public Schools Art Department’s 28th annual Empty Bowls fundraiser, held Nov. 25 at Park Place Banquet Center in Dearborn. Carolyn holds the bowl she made, while Eleanore’s was selected by a guest earlier.

By Sue Suchyta
For MediaNews Group

Colorful student ceramics were in the spotlight Nov. 25 as Dearborn Public Schools held its 28th annual Empty Bowls soup supper, which helps raise funds to combat food insecurity.

The event, held at Park Place Banquet Center, provides a simple bowl of soup and some bread, as well as a ceramic selection, for a suggested $5 donation. Raffles also were available, with the proceeds shared between Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan and Blessings in a Backpack.

Gleaners collects food from local stores, restaurants and other sources and redistributes it to food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters throughout Southeastern Michigan. Blessings in a Backpack sends schoolchildren in need of food insecurity home with a backpack full of food for the weekend during the school year.

Fatme Faraj, DPS executive director of student achievement, said she was amazed by the art created by the students in the district under the guidance of the district’s art department.

"For the cause they do this work for – and this is a yearly event – we are very proud of them," she said. "They work very hard, and they recruit others to help, as well."

Faraj said students, parents, teachers and the community come together to help those in need.
Community are all involved in the event's success.

School Supt. Glenn Maleyko, who selects a piece of student work each year during the Empty Bowls event, said he selected a bowl from the Fordson High School student art table this year, which he said he is going to place in the superintendent's conference room and fill with chocolate and other treats.

"It is an awesome event, and it is for a good cause," he said. "The students are passionate, and it is promoting the arts, but it is also promoting the students doing good things in the community."

Maleyko said DPS has a strong arts program and ongoing support for events like Empty Bowls.

"As we come up on this holiday season, we have a lot of people in need, and this helps," he said. "This is a great way for the students to come together under the leadership of the art teachers."

School board President Mary Petitchkoff said her offspring, who are now in their 30s, participated in Empty Bowls in the 1990s.

"I think that it is great that we give a purpose outside of the area for art for the students to connect with the community," she said.

"They get to express themselves artistically while doing a good deed for the community."

Petitchkoff said the school board is strongly committed to providing students with an art curriculum because the program provides students with the inspiration, especially those who struggle in other areas.

U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-12th District), who selected a small pink medalion from the Howard Elementary School art table with the words "BE KIND" on it, said she is going to adapt it so she can wear it on her lapel in Washington, D.C., as a reminder to others.

"I love these kids and I love their talent, and I love that they are caring about helping someone else," Dingell said. "These kids re-instill in you hope that people still know what it means to be part of a community."

Art resource teacher Susan Briggs said she was proud of her students.

"The whole community is in support," she said. "The art teachers are amazing, and the principals, executive directors and the superintendent are here and showing a lot of support."

Briggs said she worked on the Empty Bowls project with students at Maples Elementary School this year.

"We talk about it being a community service-learning project, where they are helping people who might be a little less fortunate, and they are really excited about that part, too," Briggs said. "When they come for the first time, they are really amazed at what an awesome event this is, and all the attention it does bring."

Briggs said the event will likely raise about $3,500 for Gleaners and Blessings in a Backpack. She said Gleaners works with DPS to provide food for the families of students that need it, as well.

She said Rovin Ceramics donates about 200 pounds of clay for this event each year, and Motawi Tileworks donates items for the Empty Bowls tin can raffle.

"It takes a village, and everyone is really supportive, especially Park Place, whoHoward Elementary School students and sisters Jenna (left), 9, and Emily Skinner, 11, with the ceramic bowls they made for the Dearborn Public Schools Art Department's 28th annual Empty Bowls fundraiser, held Nov. 25 at Park Place Banquet Center in Dearborn.

Snow Elementary School student artist Leah Kumm, 8, made a ceramic pot, and a student in another class glazed it with a rainbow array of colors. She said she liked the project and the cause it supports.

Howard Elementary School student artist Emily Skinner, 11, said it was cool that the students created so many different types of art.

Leah Kumm, 8, a student at Snow Elementary School, shows the ceramic bowl she made for the Dearborn Public Schools Art Department's 28th annual Empty Bowls fundraiser Nov. 25 at Park Place Banquet Center in Dearborn.

"They have vases, cups, and bowls, and we are all helping the less fortunate," she said.

Her sister, Jenna Skinner, 9, said it felt good to know they were helping others, and she had fun working with clay. Both girls said they hope to take part in the Empty Bowls fundraiser next year, as well.

Adam Jezewski attended Empty Bowls with his daughters Caroline, 8, and Eleanor, 9, who are both part of the after-school art program at Whitmore-Bolles Elementary School, which created ceramic art for Empty Bowls.

"It is awesome that they got to make some art that is able to be used for the benefit, and their art got selected by someone to take home," Jezewski said. "I am very proud and happy."