

Students at Fairview study war and peace

"I will not play at tug o' war
I'd rather play at hug o' war
Where everyone hugs instead of
tugs..."

— Shet Silverstein
"Hug O' War"

By Casey Hens
staff writer

The very young students at Fairview Early Childhood Center in Farmington Hills are trying to understand war by a peaceful means.

The words of author Shet Silverstein grace their walls, and their hallways are filled with a friendship chain and white doves as part of an all-school theme of "Peace and Friendship."

Because of the escalating military build-up in the Persian Gulf area last fall, Fairview chose the theme, which took on a very real meaning in recent weeks as the U.S. became involved in fighting with Iraq.

"It carries over and gives us a

THE GULF

WAR

Hitting Home

base to talk about things that are going on in the world at their level," said principal Mary Lou Somerville, about the students who are kindergarten age and younger. "When they bring their concerns to school, that's when we take that teachable moment."

A staff committee comprised of teachers Sue Dankovich, Lyn Pawlowski and Diana Homanowski worked together to develop the "Peace and Friendship" theme. Students made white doves, which hang in the school's hallways and offer each student's definition of peace. Lining the hallways are cutouts of children holding hands — an attempt to circle the school in a gesture of

friendship.

Students also participated a special assembly, where they physically held hands in a friendship circle to "hug the school," Somerville said, and brought cookies in to school to share with classmates.

They selected the theme partially because of the tension in the Middle East.

"I think people were aware of the situation," Somerville said. "It was kind of tenuous over there. It really gets to the true meaning of the holiday — this really brings it back."

Somerville said despite the tension overseas, teachers at Fairview are making a special effort to assure children that they are safe, and to encourage parents to maintain a daily routine, which gives children a feeling of security.

On Jan. 21, the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, many of the students talked about peace and war and their feelings about the situation. "That kind of opened things up," Somerville added. "It's been a vehicle that's opened so many things up."



Fairview kindergartners Steven Perry and Angela Altus are the human link to a paper chain of little people that lines the walls as part of the school's "Peace and Friendship" theme.

District's bilingual staff lends an ear to students

Students in Farmington are getting extra support during these troubled times in the Middle East.

Farmington schools bilingual director Haroune Alameddine and his staff are floating from building to building throughout the district — with many centered at high schools — to offer an ear to students troubled by events in the Persian Gulf area. The bilingual staff is there as an added counseling resource to other staff members.

The Farmington area has become a melting pot in recent years, including a number of cultures stemming from the Arabic, Christian and Jewish populations of the Middle East. But Alameddine said students are troubled, regardless of their background.

"Everybody is concerned — the entire student body is concerned," said Alameddine, who has divided his time personally between North Farmington, Harrison and Farmington high schools. "Everybody is really in the

same boat — all we can do is pray for peace."

NOT ONLY DO students have a general interest in the events, but some students have brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and parents in the region — either as residents of the Middle East or serving in the armed forces, Alameddine said.

Alameddine said students are "apprehensive" about the fighting, "but we try as much as possible, to make them feel comfortable. We try to be sensitive to each student's needs."

Shortly before war broke out, Alameddine returned from Lebanon and a visit to his family. "The war is very sad," he said, "but our job now is with the kids here."

"Here in our district, thank God we are doing very good and staying on top of everything. They (the students) come and tell you 'Thank you for being there.' Everything, so far, is good."



Haroune Alameddine (left), bilingual director of the Farmington Schools, talks with North Farmington High School senior Eva Kassab (center) and bilingual paraprofessional Lisa Altly.

Woman hears fear in the voice of daughter in the Middle East

By Dave Varga
staff writer

When Margaret Higuera talked to her daughter, Janice, on Sunday, Jan. 20, during a three-minute telephone call to Saudi Arabia, she could hear the fear in her child's voice.

"She was a little weak in the knees. I think all of them are afraid, whether they can say it or not," said Margaret Higuera, whose daughter, Janice, 28, is among the hundreds of thousands of U.S. servicemen and women waging war with Iraq.

Despite her fear, Army Capt. Janice Higuera, being a woman and company commander, must hold it in. She told her mother their company is in good shape and they're "psyched to go."

"Go" could mean the expected ground assault to liberate Kuwait. Although she is stationed somewhere in Saudi Arabia along with the 24th Army Brigade, her mother doesn't know precisely where she is.

ONCE, CAPTAIN HIGUERA was stationed in Dhahran. She called just before Christmas to say they were relocating.

"She said she was going to be moving, but she couldn't say where, because of security. I said, 'Are you going to be able to hear gunshots?' She said, 'Probably not. So it's sort of a guessing game.'"

Margaret and her husband, Gilberto, a physician, live in Bloomfield Hills with their sons, Philip, 15, and Michael, 16, both students at Detroit Country Day. They hear from their daughter infrequently. "Each call I figure will be her last," she said.

During her calls from Saudi Arabia, Janice, a graduate of North Farmington High School and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, asked about anti-war demonstrations going on here. She'd heard about discussion among O.C.D. students, who sent letters and packages during the holidays, over the validity of the war.

"Of course she has strong feelings



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The Higuera family of Bloomfield Hills are among thousands of American families worried about loved ones fighting in the Middle East war. Janice Higuera is a 28-year-old Army captain stationed in Saudi Arabia. The family is, from left: her brother, Mike; father, Gilberto; mother, Margaret; and brother, Philip.

that what the U.S. is doing is right," Margaret Higuera said.

Brother Philip and Michael disagree over the war, but both have been strained by their sister's dangerous position and the fact they haven't even let since last year around Labor Day.

FOR HERSELF, Margaret Higuera said, "There couldn't be more of a pacifist than I, but I think Bush has done the right thing. Life is like a school yard. If a bully hits you once you can walk away. A second time you can walk away. But if he hits you a third time, you'd better turn around and fight back."

Captain Higuera has told her mother how one day she saw 50,000 caskets unloaded. "For several days I just kept repeating 50,000 caskets," she said.

Then there was the mail the Higuera received late last year. "I think the worst thing for me was when I received her last will and testament. That was really scary," Margaret Higuera said.

Life in the desert isn't easy, Captain Higuera has told her mother. They get one hot meal a day, no hot showers, and she describes the landscape as "bleak, barren and ugly."

Right now, Margaret Higuera isn't



Janice Higuera

involved with any of the support groups for families of soldiers in the Persian Gulf. She uses family and friends for support.

"I'm not sure how I'll react when she isn't able to call at all," she said.

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Gulf crisis prompts unusual incidents

The Persian Gulf crisis continues to hit home, apparently sparking a few unusual incidents in Farmington Hills.

A 21-year-old man who was working at a Farmington Hills party store was confronted by an unidentified man about 6 p.m. Jan. 20 and asked if the store was owned by Arabs. When the man, the son of the owner, replied that it was, the unidentified man made a nasty gesture and left, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

In an unrelated incident, police found bundles of fly-

ers in the trunk of a car urging "Arab women" to attend a rally in Detroit protesting the war against Iraq. The bundles were found while police were making an inventory before impounding a car involved in a Monday accident on Freedom Road near Grand River.

An Adat Shalom Synagogue representative contacted police Sunday after receiving information that there may have been drive-by shootings at the building on Middlebelt between 13 Mile and Northwestern Highway, according to a report.