

# Invent America!

## Elementary students learn a creative approach.

See column, 17A

By TOM BAER  
STAFF WRITER

It's too bad Wooddale Elementary School and Joanna Ratanatharathorn weren't around back when Thomas Edison and Lee DeForest were youngsters.

Those two famous inventors (Edison, phonograph and light bulb; DeForest, radio vacuum tube) probably would have fit right in at the Farmington Hills school.

Thanks to Ratanatharathorn, a parent and volunteer, the Invent America! program is big at Wooddale. Invent America! is an educational program that encourages youngsters to come up with new solutions to old problems — inventions.

"I just give direction," Ratanatharathorn said. "The kids take that direction and run with it."

Still, the program is popular at the school. Recently, about 50 inventive youngsters presented their creations to be judged at the local level of Invent America! Participants had to prove a need for their inventions, as well as show that something like them didn't already exist.

The kids also had to keep detailed logs with drawings, illustrations and descriptions.

"These kids are going to heard from," said an impressed Gerald



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIER

**Inventive Kids:** Wooddale's Invent America! winners are (from left) Jessica DiDonato, Kristen Kietila, Brooke Pitchford, Evan Rosin, Jennifer Bendick, Stephanie Roberts, Charlie Stamboulou and John Szymusiak.

Flagg, a judge at the recent competition.

Wooddale winners will advance to regional and state competition. They are:

Kindergarten — Evan Rosin, "Nail Zipper."

First grade — Kristen Kietila, "Pump Toothbrush."

Second grade — John Szymusiak, "Shoe Lake Locks."

Third grade — Jessica DiDonato, "Fire Rings."

Fourth grade — Stephanie Roberts, "E-Z Ski Carrier."

Fifth grade — Charlie Stamboulou, "Wet Eraser."

Special Needs — Brooke Pitchford, "The Talking Microwave."

Household — John Szymusiak, "Shoe Lace Locks."

Environmental — Stephen Koenigsberg, "Environmentally Friendly Reusable Juice Box."

Safety — Jessica DiDonato, "Fire Rings."

Leisure Activity — Jennifer Bendick, "Where's My Stuff?"

**Hard at work:** Invent America! judges (clockwise from left) are Jerry Takis, Min-Shih Chen, Paul Szymusiak, Joe Spoke, Cathy Webb, Gerald Flagg and Joan Balabuch.



Ribbon winner: Joanna Ratanatharathorn pins a ribbon on Jessica DiDonato.

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