

Dunckel poets get with the beat, toast Longfellow

BY TIM SMITH
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■ 'Not only is it fun to hear everybody read, we can just hang out and talk with each other.'

*Kristen Schlaff
—Dunckel eighth-grader*

Longfellow lives! Or, at least, his legacy was brought back to life on "Longfellow Day," Friday, Feb. 26, at the Grand Cafe in Farmington, thanks to the Dunckel Middle School "Unplugged Team."

To honor the great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's birthday, Dunckel students passed around the microphone and read some of his works, the works of others (Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Frost or Dr. Seuss, for example) or recited poems and passages they penned themselves. Some even sang original songs to guitar and bongo accompaniment.

For ambiance, there was a huge birthday cake, with a portrait of Longfellow (1807-1882) next to it. And Dunckel teacher Steve Koponen circulated throughout the basement cafe in the role of Longfellow himself. To make the performance more realistic, Koponen donned a white wig, mustache and beard and wore the kind of suit Longfellow might have worn.

The "Unplugged Team" is comprised of nearly 60 students in the seventh and eighth grades. One of those is Kristen Schlaff, who sang her own song, "What Love Can Cause." She also was instrumental in organizing the Longfellow tribute.

"Through something like this, people who were famous a long time ago will always be remembered," Kristen said.

The afternoon had a spin-off benefit, she said. "Not only is it fun to hear everybody read, we can just hang out and talk with each other."

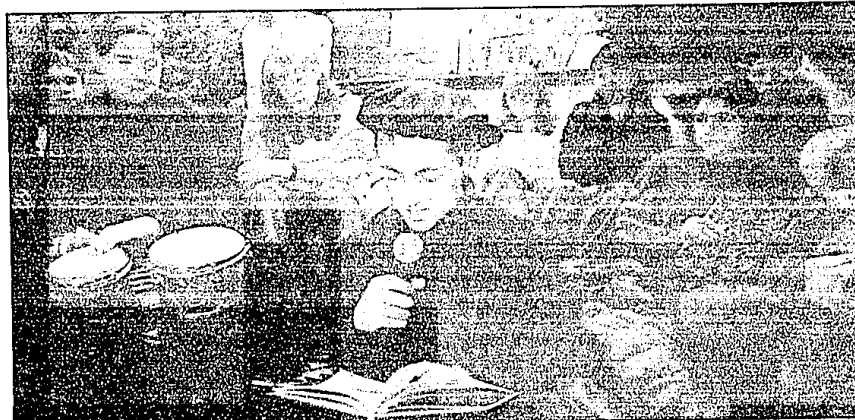
Students read poems such as Poe's "The Raven," Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and Dr. Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham." And, of course, Longfellow's work wasn't forgotten: he wrote poems such as "Hiawatha," "Paul

Revere's Ride" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus."

Koponen said the idea to toast Longfellow came about after finding out that students in schools across America read his works on his 75th, and last, birthday in 1882.

"We just thought it'd be a nice way to incorporate the language arts and have some fun and also try to revive this tradition," Koponen said. "We wanted to go back in time, and have a coffee house poetry reading."

The work of fireside poet Longfellow is still popular, Koponen said, in part because "he brought poetry to everyone, not just the (upper class) folks."



Poetry with a beat: Members of Dunckel Middle School's "Unplugged Team" recite the Dr. Seuss classic, "Green Eggs and Ham," during the recent birthday tribute to Longfellow at the Grand Cafe in Farmington. Reading the poem is eighth-grader Bill Naife. On the bongos is Tom Szafranski, eighth grade.



Longfellow serenaded: In photo, at far left, Dunckel teacher Steve Koponen portrayed Longfellow in fine fashion. Near left, Kristen Schlaff was instrumental in organizing the event, and even sang a song she wrote, titled "What Love Can Cause."

STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL CHAPMAN

Students have a hot time at party

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Last fall, during the Silent Auction for Cloverdale Developmental Center, one particularly hot item on the block caught the attention of Carolyn Das — a birthday party with the Farmington Hills Fire Chief.

Das and husband Richard shelled out \$100 for the item, buying it as a gift for their son, Stephen, who turns 8 this month.

Stephen, along with special needs classmates, parents and their teacher, Vitas Underys, came out for the big party day, Feb. 16, at William Grace Elementary School.

Although Fire Chief Richard Marinucci could not be at the festivities, Assistant Chief Bob Robby was — along with other members of the department and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FARMINGTON HILLS FIRE DEPARTMENT

Buddy system: This Farmington Hills firefighter got to know William Grace Elementary School student Andrew Houde.

a fire truck.

"The firemen put on their gear and talked about fire safety," said Carolyn Das, a Farmington resident. "And the kids got to ride in the truck, feel the equipment ... squirt the fire hose at their teacher."

Das said the fire truck made a 10-minute drive through the neighborhood surrounding Grace, with sirens blaring.

"Everyone enjoyed that," she said, adding that Stephen "had a wonderful time, probably the most fun birthday party he's had."

The fun-filled day concluded in the gymnasium, with chil-

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*Carolyn Das
—parent*

dren breaking open a candy-filled pinata, appropriately shaped like a fire engine.

William Grace parent Kathy Gannon (son James) bought the pinata and Das supplied it with the necessary goodies.

Taking aim: An emergency fire department technician helps William Grace student Stephen Das and his mom, Carolyn, squirt a fire hose during the birthday "party," which she purchased for Stephen at last fall's Silent Auction to benefit Cloverdale Developmental Center.



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