

Beechview peer mediators help students resolve conflicts

BY TIM SMITH
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Wherever there are school playgrounds, youngsters naturally follow. So do "kid stuff" disputes.

It is why every school in the Farmington district employs some form of peer mediation or conflict resolution program — buzzwords for the process of peacefully solving an argument.

Such a program is in full swing at Beechview Elementary School, where during an assembly recently, 59 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders were formally introduced to the rest of the school's student body.

Six Harrison High School peer mediators also participated in the assembly, to help with a role-playing skit and talk about how conflict resolution skills are important throughout their school lives and beyond.

"I wanted them to show the kids that peer mediation continues after they leave here," said Elisa Maher, student assistance program coordinator at Beechview, about the visit. Participating were Harrison students Liz Booth, Angela Fodor, Martez Gibbs, Ashley Hardison, Mindy Marks and Agim Shabaj. "They told kids that peer mediation is not a bad thing, or 'un-cool.' They told them that they're brave to want to work



Word play: Beechview Elementary School students (from left) Chris Scriven, James Stallings, Sarah Yaldo and Michael Trus spell out part of the words "peer mediation" during a recent assembly.

out their problems. The big kids are still doing this."

Essential

About the importance of peer mediation, Maher emphasized that it is essential in an increasingly-complex world.

"Things are so complex these days, they (students) come from so many places and situations," she said. "And a lot of them don't (yet) have skills to be problem solvers; they don't have coping skills."

"Kids need choices to solve problems, but they must be posi-

tive choices. This teaches not only them but the entire school that there is an alternative to pushing, shoving and screaming."

One of the Beechview peer mediators taking part in the skit was fourth-grader Theresa Matthews. She played one of two youngsters arguing on the playground during recess about whose turn it was to use the jump rope.

Theresa and the other student both laid claim to the jump rope, and Harrison students — as peer mediators — helped them work out their dispute.

"We discussed it, thought about what we could do," Theresa said, recalling the skit. "... We both apologized to each other and then got a second rope."

Just listen

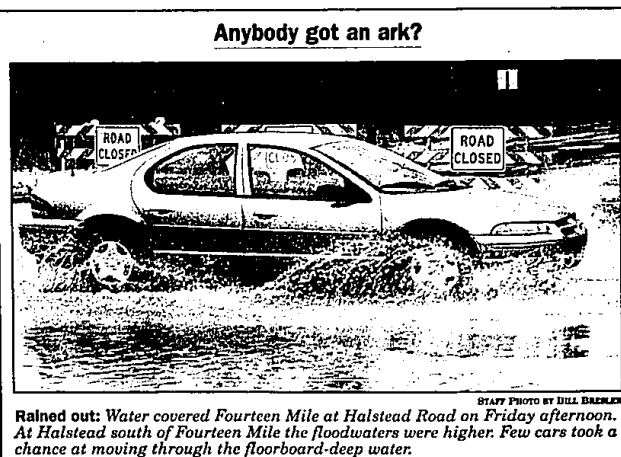
Listening calmly to both sides is an important job for a peer mediator. Another is asking the right questions, which entails following a carefully-prepared script. The "disputants," meanwhile, are not permitted to interrupt or put the other person down, explained Theresa.

"You have to know what you're doing" as a mediator, said Theresa in matter-of-fact fashion.

Mediators have to remain impartial, too. That can be tested when the dispute involves a friend and a "foe" of the mediator.



In step: Performing for schoolmates are Beechview Elementary's Star Singers, featuring students (from left) Stephanie Delbel, Tabetha Chapman, Emily Dobson, Michele Krasnesky and Kari Durbin.



Anybody got an ark?

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BAZEMER

Rained out: Water covered Fourteen Mile at Halstead Road on Friday afternoon. At Halstead south of Fourteen Mile the floodwaters were higher. Few cars took a chance at moving through the floorboard-deep water.

YMCA fund-raising effort kicks off

BY JONI HUBRED
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Folks at the Farmington Area YMCA put a little "fun" in the word "fund-raising" this week, with a kick off for their 2001 Partners with Youth campaign.

Executive Director Rick DuRei had board members dress up as hunters and farmers, as a way to identify two towns whose goal is to raise \$72,000 by April 15. The money goes to support scholarships for the organization's many programs.

Fund-raising is not always an easy business, but DuRei said the 30 board members will be going out into the community simply to talk about what the YMCA does. Hunters will look for new donors, farmers will tend the fields of those who have supported the drive in previous years.

"Really, what we're doing is telling a story, and the dollars follow the story," he said.

The message hit home with board member Carleigh Flaherty — or "Calamity Carleigh" — who

is in charge of the hunters.

"My role is really to work with my team members and help them identify folks in the community we can share the YMCA story with," she said. "Our direction is to be able to send a kid to

for kids to use the facilities on Farmington Road near 12 Mile, \$21,000 for pre-school and before

and after school programs, as well as a program for adults with disabilities. For information, call 248-553-4020.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BAZEMER

Go getters: Bill "Billy the Kid" Ryan, Greg "The Sheriff" Switaj, Rick "Deputy" DuRei and "Calamity" Carleigh Flaherty kick off a new fund-raising season.

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