

# Gill

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Safari With Us!" building tour. Also enjoying the safari tour were current students such as third grader Elizabeth Heffron, who undoubtedly would hate to see her school fold — which remains a distinct possibility.

"It's really fun," Elizabeth said. "I want (Gill) year-round to stay and I hope that it will."

A lot will depend on how many parents were impressed enough Monday night to sign up and possibly recruit others into the ninth-year program. With representatives from nearly 50 families in attendance, the response to the presentation appeared to be positive.

Currently, there are about 100 students enrolled in the year-round program, which is located in one wing of traditional Gill Elementary.

"We've heard there is more individualized attention (from teachers) in the year-round program and a shorter summer break," said John Collins of Farmington Hills, in attendance with his wife, Kelly. "So there's better retention."

And John has some personal experience to draw from, having attended a Plymouth-based year-round school in seventh grade.

"You do get bored in summer time," he said. "This (program) allows them to make a better transition to the next grade, because they are still learning."

The Collins' live in the Gill attendance area and are looking to enroll two children into the year-round program for next year. Their daughter, Kaitlin, now attends second grade at the traditional Gill school and their son, Cameron, will start kindergarten in the fall.

Another interested family were the Barnes', including Barbara, Stanley and their 5-year-old son, Jordan.

They went along the safari

route, which included opportunities for children to visit teachers and participate in activities such as "Pin the Trunk on the Elephant" in first grade teacher Cindy Shuster's classroom.

"We really want to get him enrolled here," said Stanley, a city of Farmington Hills firefighter. "All we're doing now is to get him excited about what the school offers."

## Comparison

In the crowded media center, Zimmerer compared the year-round and traditional calendar, attempting to show there is less difference than what might be perceived.

"People understand the calendar, and just seeing it to make a visual comparison is an important thing," said Zimmerer, adding that one of the problems in selling the program is "perception. People need to see the calendar."

Highlights of the year-round calendar include the following:

■ Students attend school for 183 days, just like traditional elementary and follow the identical curriculum.

■ At Gill, children from the year-round and traditional schools frequently get together for lunches, assemblies and recesses to form a building-wide community.

■ Both schools start at the same time, in late August. But whereas traditional schools end in early June, the Gill Year Round Education Program concludes in mid-July, still allowing about six weeks of summer vacation.

■ The shorter summer vacation doesn't mean youngsters and their families miss out on breaks and trips. They instead are imbedded throughout the rest of the school year, with two-week breaks in November and

February (traditional students also are off for one of those two weeks in each break) and a two-week break in May. Those breaks are called intercessions.

Parents also asked what might be the social impact of moving a child from the traditional school setting or from a different school attendance area. In particular, they wanted to know if existing friendships might be jeopardized.

But Zimmerer, staff members and parents of students now in the program assured them that, if anything, youngsters make new friends while keeping their old ones.

"It's just broadened his horizons," Barb Maas, whose son Zachary attends kindergarten in the year-round program, responded from the audience.

## It works for them

Adding insight was Zachary's dad, Terry Maas spoke glowingly about the program; he mentioned that he became sold on year-round education after attending a similar information/orientation meeting a year ago.

"I can't say enough good things about it and that's why I'm on the committee to keep it," said Terry Maas. "I believe in it and I believe it works."

Following the meeting, Barb Maas and Zimmerer seemed optimistic.

"The parents I talked to were sold on the idea," Maas said. "They felt, as I do, that we're not an agricultural society anymore. We don't need three months off for summer anymore. It's just a logical calendar, it makes sense."

Zimmerer sounded cautiously optimistic that the parents who attended the meeting will sign up for next year — kindergarten registration is in the week beginning Monday, Feb. 26 — and per-

haps spread the word. To help keep information flowing, a video is being produced to soon air on education channel 10. Many parents will continue to actively promote the program.

## Apples and oranges

Other positive aspects of the year-round program, according to a fact sheet distributed at the meeting, include: reducing stress and burnout for teachers and students; increasing student motivation.

One parent at the meeting, Joy Davis, is still unsure about enrolling a child in the program for next year. She wants to find out if it stacks up academically to the traditional calendar and if families keep their children enrolled for the duration of their elementary education.

"I'd like to find out if the numbers are dwindling by fifth grade," Davis said. "... Are people sticking with it?"

According to Zimmerer, class sizes are too small to make a comparison with traditional schools.

"But they (at the year round school) do less review," Zimmerer explained. "Students are fresh and ready to learn after each intercession."

To answer Davis' other question, enrollment has dropped in recent years. But the level of loyalty and devotion to the program remains at a peak level.

The bottom line facing the Gill Year-Round Education Program — such devotion must quickly translate into increased enrollment.

"The parents have been outstanding to work with and have certainly done more than I ever dreamed of," Zimmerer said.

"They are dedicated to the spirit of year-round. Now, we wait and see."



Shot in the dark: Leighton Douglas Gaines plays pin the trunk on the elephant.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BREWER  
What's it all about?: Principal Gayle Zimmerer discusses the year-round school concepts with Stan and Brenda Barnes. One-year-old Brandon snoozes on his Dad's shoulder while his brother Jordan visited class rooms.



Worksheet time: Christie Scott has a question about early explorers of the new world for teacher Karen Quigley.

# Apple

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blue sea waters, affixed to the inner boat walls to resemble port holes; a drawbridge connected to the boat by paper chains and rope; and a French flag.

"A child had an old French flag and thought, 'Hey, let's be sailing for France,'" Quigley explained.

## On deck

Inside the innovative creation, Quigley and students together read textbook passages about explorers Cortez, DeSoto, Coronado and deBalboa. Then they began designing posters or brochures for their own ships, some with the use of classroom computers.

For example, such work included:

■ Students Murphy Thiel and Baratt Shanaman, who etched the beginnings of posters for their respective fictitious ships, "Shrimpmate" and the "S.S. Shanaman."

■ Student Ben Peven, who was typing a help wanted advertisement for his boat, "The German Sailor." Among positions needed were chef, deck hand, assistant captain, doctor and shipwright.

■ Also working on a computer was student John Bowden, experimenting with text styles for his "Sea King" poster.

According to John, he planned to "make it look old by using different fonts and then burn the edges. Actually, my Mom and Dad will help me do that."

About the classroom boat, John said it really helps get everybody into the right mood for learning about historical adventures. "We're explorers now."

## Rewarding

By providing a visual and thematic connection to the material, Quigley emphasized that students learn the subject a variety of ways.

But they also "take ownership with so much that goes on," said Quigley, while her students were participating in a mid-day segment with Spanish teacher Flora Chinchilla.

"Like with the decision making, like on building the boat," Quigley noted. "It's a classroom community."

That such projects are successfully motivating her students makes her job easier and much more rewarding than requiring them to memorize facts and recite them by rote.

"It's about seeing the kids faces every day, that they are excited about being in class," Quigley said with a smile. "Their brains are clicking together, coming up with this idea (the boat project) and then making it happen. That's what keeps you going."



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BREWER  
High Tech: Baratt Shanaman checks his homework.

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