

# Kids quilt, raise money for dogs

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Students at St. Mary's School in Canandaigua spent the first half of the school year studying reading, writing and arithmetic — with some lessons on quilting and puppies thrown in for good measure.

As a service project, students in Kelly Tanis' third-grade class, Suzanne Giovenco's fourth-grade class and Mary Zappia Cowles' fifth-grade class learned how to piece together quilts to raise money for Amity Amen, their adopted guide-dog-in-training.

Substitute teacher Mary Schmidt volunteers with Upstate Guide Dogs in East Bloomfield, which raises and trains guide dogs for the blind. She and Cowles decided that, as a service project, each grade would create a quilt, raffle it off during Catholic Schools Week and use the money to fund training of a guide dog.

Schmidt brought the puppy to school in June 2003 to meet the students, who had the task of naming her.

"The name had to begin with an 'A' because the puppy was the first one born of the litter, and we thought it should have some connection with the school," Cowles said.

The two most popular names were Amity, meaning friendship, and Amen, so the students decided to christen the puppy with both. In the fall, students each brought in a piece of fabric and began learning how to make a quilt.

Schmidt, often accompanied by Amity Amen, and several other volunteers taught students how to measure, cut and sew their quilt squares.

"It was fun, because I've never used a sewing machine, and I think it was a great way to help Amity,"



Amity Amen

third-grader Alex Kasper said.

Alexandra Chapman said none of her fourth-grade classmates really knew how to use a sewing machine either,

but "I think it turned out really good," she said.

"They were really amazed at what they could do. They all used the sewing machine ... some of the boys were especially into the mechanics of it," Cowles said.

After the squares were finished, the volunteers and teachers helped the students assemble the quilts. Cowles said Amity's presence helped make the project exciting for the students because each time the dog visited, the students could see how her training had progressed.

Third-grader Tenley Albright said the project was fun because "it helped the guide dogs, and our class did it together. It's important to help support the guide dogs."

Other students enjoyed having the opportunity to learn new skills.

"It helped me learn a lot," said fifth-grader George VanBrooker. "Some parts were hard, but some parts were easy and fun. Cutting the squares for the right size, that was pretty easy, and fun too. It was pretty cool helping the community."

Fifth-grader Stephanie Smith said she also enjoyed cutting and sewing the quilt squares.

"It was kind of hard at first, but it got easier. It was a good experience," said Stephanie, adding that she might make a quilt again now that she knows how.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Bristol Utter (foreground) and Katie Crouse, fifth-graders at St. Mary's School in Canandaigua, baste the quilt their class created earlier this year. The quilt will be raffled Jan. 30 to raise funds for East Bloomfield's Upstate Guide Dogs and the training of Amity Amen, a yellow Labrador retriever the class is sponsoring.



Each grade finished its quilt before Christmas break, but the project was hardly over. A large portion of the students' January exams had to do with the project, Cowles said. Exam questions included solving multiplication problems to determine how many stitches were in the quilt as well as writing about the history of guide dogs, how seeing-eye

dogs help people and some of the causes of blindness.

"That was really good because it made it practical. There's so much they got out of it," Cowles said. "All three of (the quilts) came out really pretty. It was a lot of fun, and it was just amazing to see how it got put together."

Raffle tickets for the quilts — which are \$1 each or \$5 for six — are available until Jan. 30 by calling St. Mary's School at 585/394-4300. The quilts will be raffled off Jan. 30 during the school's Third Annual Business Carnival.

## Senate approves school-voucher plan for D.C.

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Senate's Jan. 22 approval of a \$14 million voucher plan for low-income students in the District of Columbia was good news to Catholic officials.

"I'm euphoric," said Ronald Jackson, executive director of the District of Columbia Catholic Conference, who has watched this legislation go through various stages over the years and had been confident this year that the "time was right" for its approval.

"We had all the pieces in place," he told Catholic News Service Jan. 23. He also was quick to point out that the legislation, which President Bush is expected to sign into law, will not merely provide voucher funds but also will benefit the district's public and charter schools. The House passed similar legislation last fall.

The plan will provide \$14 million for vouchers over a five-year period, offering 1,700 low-income children scholarship grants of \$7,500 to

attend private or religious schools and allowing \$1 million for administrative costs. The bill, which is expected to go into effect next fall, also includes \$13 million for public schools and \$13 million for charter schools in the District of Columbia.

The three-part aspect of the legislation was unique, said Jackson, describing it as "collaborative with one goal in mind: to educate these kids."

The vouchers would first be available to students enrolled in failing

public schools. Currently, 15 schools within the District of Columbia fit that description, according to recent test scores. Families earning about \$36,000 a year for a family of four, or income not exceeding 185 percent of the poverty level, will qualify.

Students will be able to use vouchers toward private or religious schools in the district, where there are 22 Catholic elementary schools and five high schools run by the Archdiocese of Washington.