

## Giving back to the children

### S.P.I.C.E. volunteers encourage children to keep a journal

By **Kristine Coman**

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Horses, wolves, bunnies and cars are just a few of the examples of the art work that adorns the cover of journals made by the volunteers of S.P.I.C.E. (Seniors Participating in Community Education) and given to elementary school children to encourage the children to express themselves.

The members of S.P.I.C.E. have been dedicated to assisting children in the Mountain Area for many years.

The S.P.I.C.E. volunteers make journals out of recycled cereal boxes.

Hugs were in abundance at Coarsegold Elementary School during the first week in March when volunteers visited Valerie Porter's third grade class.

Oleta Johnson, S.P.I.C.E. director, and several other volunteers brought the students the journals.

The journals are used for school projects as well as to encourage children to write down their thoughts.

"The children are invited to jot down their creative expressions," Johnson said.

Many of the volunteers hail from Park Sierra, a co-op RV park in the Coarsegold area.

Not surprisingly, this lively group loves to travel and see new and favorite places and people.

Participating in the recent classroom visit were volunteers Barbara Morris, Jane Crouch, Zivi Kranson, Bonnie Garcia, Gerda Crane, Gert Jensen and Willi Atkins.

Johnson tries to keep out of the limelight, but spends countless hours devoted to S.P.I.C.E.

In spite of some challenges, she continues to direct and coordinate the program, letting very little stand in her way.



S.P.I.C.E. volunteers are pictured with Mrs. Porter's third grade class. The volunteers are pictured in the back row, from left to right: volunteers Barbara Morris, Jane Crouch, Zivi Kranson, Bonnie Garcia, Gerda Crane, Gert Jensen, Willi Atkins and Oleta Johnson. Mrs. Porter is on the right.

Photo by Kristine Coman

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Her dedication and generosity, along with those same qualities in all of the people involved with S.P.I.C.E., have not gone unappreciated, but Johnson is humble.

"We are just a behind-the-scenes group who try to help local children," Johnson said.

The S.P.I.C.E. program began in 1988. The United Way helped the organization get started in the Mountain Area.

A total of 10,029 journals have been made from 1998 through February 2006.

During the 2004/2005 school year, S.P.I.C.E. members logged a total of 20,173 volunteer hours.

"Jane Crouch is our journal coordinator," Johnson said. "She loves enhancing the journals with her art work."

Those participating in S.P.I.C.E. work with Bass Lake Elementary, North Fork Elementary, Raymond/Knowles School, Rivergold, Coarsegold Elementary, Oakhurst Elementary School and Oak Creek Intermediate School.

"The volunteers also work in the classrooms helping the teachers while others do one-on-one tutoring plus anything the teachers need help with," Johnson said.

Johnson said while students gain the benefits from the S.P.I.C.E. volunteers, it's the volunteers that are gifted.

"We receive more than we give by working with the students," she said.

Volunteers are always needed and welcome. If you would like to volunteer to help local school children, call (559) 683-3811.



S.P.I.C.E. volunteer Barbara Morris (right) is pictured with Mrs. Porter and two journal recipients.  
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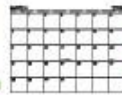
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