

# Steppin' Out Dance, Music at GES

by Mimi Noorani

Greenbelt Elementary students have moved, grooved, acted and sung to curricula provided by professional performance artists this past academic year. Three artists in residence helped integrate drama, African dance and Latin American music for both school-wide assemblies and classroom activities with individual students.

Increasing arts opportunities has been a goal of the school and the PTA. In addition to residencies with professional artists, teacher trainings and existing music and visual arts programs, there have been art-oriented field trips to the Community Center, after-school art classes, more arts supplies and a concerted effort to host opportunities for teachers to bring more arts into their classrooms.

"I know that I worked harder to include opportunities for students to express themselves artistically more often this year than in years when it wasn't a focus," said sixth grade reading teacher Beth Novick. "During the year, I have seen increased ability and interest in arts such as drawing, designing, singing, drama – all things that can be integrated into reading/language arts with a little effort. As a result, kids created more clever and creative projects. For me, it made teaching more fun. For students it made learning more meaningful."

During fall 2009 drama teacher and author Lenore Blank Kelner conducted training for all teachers and worked with classes in first, third and fifth grades on techniques for using drama to portray characters in stories and enhance the interpretation of literature. Students were invited to get out of their seats and use their bodies and voices to show their understanding of the characters in the stories being read.

This spring Latin American musicians Cecilia Esquivel and Dani Cortaza held multiple sessions with each kindergarten class to familiarize students with the traditional instruments and music of native, Spanish and Portuguese peoples in Latin America, as well



Vocalist Cecilia Esquivel and Guitarist Dani Cortaza lead kindergarteners on a musical journey through Latin America.

as with the region's geography, languages and stories.

The entire school attended a Latin music performance by Esquivel's band Cantare, where members of the group also took time to speak with several of the Latin American students at Greenbelt.

Also this spring members of the professional dance group Dishibem, a contemporary and traditional West African dance company, worked with second, fourth, and sixth grade students and teachers on dances and cultures of Africa. Dishibem's work culminated in a school-wide assembly on May 19 featuring student performances.

### African Dances

Second graders worked diligently with principal Dishibem dancer Deidre Dawkins, learning regional African dances and the stories behind them, particularly those from Mali and Guinea. During the assembly, each second grade class performed a separate dance, sharing the stage with Dawkins. The students complemented Dawkins nicely with their dancing as well as their enthusiastic and joyful expressions.

Fourth and sixth graders worked with Dishibem's Kwame Opare, whose resume credits include off-Broadway's Stomp. For the assembly, Kwame arranged his 160 students into intersecting lines.

His piece, inspired by a South African miner's gumboot dance,

was an interweaving of his callings, clappings and footwork patterns echoed by intricate clappings and footwork of the 160 students. The effectively unified rhythms became music in itself and the piece culminated with a group of fourth graders singing a melodic African song that was complemented by percussive stepping.

Music teacher Dara Case played a leading role in coordinating the residencies. "In addition to providing performing arts opportunities at the school, we looked for these residencies to provide rich cultural experiences and encourage learning by movement," said Case.

"I found it delightful to see so many of the students performing at an assembly. Students, like anyone, can be a bit anxious about performing but they seemed really proud of their work and did a great job."

Performing arts residencies and assemblies have been made possible by support from the Maryland State Arts Council, the Prince George's Arts Council, the Washington Performing Arts Society and the Greenbelt Elementary PTA. The PTA also has received additional funding from the Greenbelt Advisory Committee on Education and the Greenbelt Community Foundation to support arts-integrated learning.

Mimi Noorani is president of the Greenbelt Elementary School PTA.

## GES Volunteers Honored

Greenbelt Elementary School added four names of volunteers to its recognition plaques at the annual Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast on May 21. The honorees have supported the school on a frequent basis over several years.



Those pictured (left to right) are Charles Tompkins, Dora Hamm, Kimberly Seidel (Principal), Linda Edwards and Lyn Doyle (separate photo).

## Saving American Shad

by Beatriz Jose, 4th grade

My name is Beatriz Jose. I am a fourth grader at Greenbelt Elementary School. My classmates and I raised shad eggs. We released them in April at the Old Port of Bladensburg.

Shad eggs are tiny when they are babies. When they are adults, they are huge. Baby shad fish eat only their own egg sacs. We did this experiment because shad are endangered and to save their species. In 1980 they were almost extinct because of pollution. When shad are fully grown, they swim back to where they were hatched and raise their eggs there. They live in Maryland rivers, swim to the Chesapeake Bay and finally into the Atlantic Ocean.

Before the shad arrived, we were really excited, although we had to do a bunch of work. Teachers were strict but I do not blame them. Of course, we were saving the species in our classroom.

The day the shad arrived, we were surprised! They looked so

cute. Their eyes and body were so tiny. Now, we had to work really hard. If shad do not have the right things and they are not healthy, they die.

Setting the shad free was so fun and at the same time sad. A lot of them were alive. We rode there on a bus. When we set them free, we each had a shad fish inside a cup. We counted to three and shouted, "Good-bye Shad!"

I guess all of the hard work paid off. We worked together, we had fun and it was an awesome experience!

**Editor's Note:** Jose's article was submitted by Greenbelt Elementary School fourth grade teacher Molly Simms, who writes her "students were involved in an awesome project to increase the declining shad population in our important streams, rivers, Bay and ocean. As a class assignment, students wrote newspaper articles explaining the project. My students selected this article as the best one."

## ASG Offers Talk on Astrolabes

On Thursday, June 24 at 7:30 p.m. the Astronomical Society of Greenbelt (ASG) meeting will feature a talk by Dr. Harold Williams about "Astrolabes through Dark Ages to Present Dark Matter."

Williams is the director of the Montgomery College planetarium and teaches astronomy and physics courses at several area colleges. A native of Florida, he

received his bachelor of science from Florida State University, his master of science degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University.

The meeting will be held in Room 103 of the Greenbelt Community Center, 15 Crescent Road. All are welcome; the event is free.



Second graders perform their moves to fellow students led by Dishibem dancer Deidre Dawkins.