Massive makeover

By Devin Felix

Students of Millville Elementary arrived Monday morning at a school much different than the one they left Friday afternoon.

Halls that were once blank and white were alive with colorful letters, numbers and artwork. The cafeteria, as well as every classroom, had fresh paint. Dozens of trees, shrubs and bushes stood where none had before. Slides, monkey bars and hopscotch courses were given a fresh coat of paint and a giant map of the United States covered the asphalt.

“When they walked in and the walls were so bright and colorful and inviting, they just had wonderment on their faces,” said principal Maria Nielsen. “The kids said things like, ‘Wow, this is like Disneyland!’ and ‘Look at the lunchroom, it looks like Skittles and Starbursts!’”

The changes were the result of 350 volunteers who converged on the school Saturday. Millville was one of 10 schools in Utah to be a part of Comcast Cares Day, a day of service that takes place all across the country.

All told, about 2,300 volunteers in Utah and about 50,000 nationwide took part, said Comcast public relations director Ray Child.

Community, school and company representatives had been planning the massive project for about a year, Nielsen said. They recruited volunteers, sought donations and planned what they wanted the school to look like.

When the day finally arrived, they weren’t disappointed. Volunteers showed up by the hundreds, including about 60 people the event’s planners hadn’t expected.

From 7 a.m. into the afternoon, teachers, students, parents, Comcast employees, Latter-day Saint missionaries and others worked together painting, planting and cleaning.

The school, which is one of the oldest in the Cache County School District, was certainly in need of a facelift, said Allison Chaffin, a parent volunteer.

“I have lived in Millville eight years and driven past the school so many times and wondered when it would look like a school instead of an asylum. Now it’s looking like a school,” Chaffin said.

The day also included the culmination of several months’ work by two Utah State University students and two classes at the school.

As part of the USU Arts Bridge program, two art students from the university came twice a week to the school to design and carry out an art project with two classes.

Shelly Card, who graduated from USU on Saturday with a major in art education and painting, worked with Shawna Dean’s fifth-grade class to design a mural and mosaic in the school.

For the mural, Card and the students portrayed the four seasons in Cache Valley. Their work was
combined and painted on four Plexiglas panels, which were hung high on a wall Saturday.

For the mosaic, each of the school’s 420 students painted a tile having to do with one of the four elements: earth, water, fire and air. The tiles — with flaming unicorns, mermaids, mountains, clouds and hundreds of other works of art — were combined and hung in a hallway Saturday.

Also with the Arts Bridge program, Dave Nagata’s fourth-grade class worked over the past months with Liz Peterson, a USU landscape architecture student. Peterson helped the students create a plan to transform a courtyard just outside the school’s south door into an outdoor classroom. On Saturday, volunteers carried out the plans, installing benches and concrete edging, and planting new trees and bushes.

“This is the culmination of many little minds and creative spirits,” said Laurie Baefsky, Arts Bridge program director.

Peterson and Card used the projects to teach students lessons in a variety of topics. Figuring out dimensions of the artwork taught about math and geometry. Describing their plans on paper taught about writing. Researching about native Utah plants taught them science.

Nagata said the process was a challenge for his students, but it taught them that what they learn in class is more than just numbers and words.

“It gave them real-life applications,” Nagata said. “They got to see how all this works in life.”

Fifth-grader Zach “Kia” Nelson was among a group of fifth-graders planting trees and painting Saturday. He said he was excited about the school’s new look, but was a little disappointed he’d be moving on to middle school next year.

“The thing that is most inspiring to me is how the community has come together to make this happen,” said Julianne Duffin, chair of the school’s community council. “It’s all for the kids. It’s to make the school a happy, kid-friendly place.”

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