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## Bringing Veterans Day to life



Photo provided

Island Lake Elementary kids performed songs for veterans on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009

One north metro elementary school works hard to reinforce the message of the military's sacrifice by having students connect with veterans in their families or the community.

By **NORMAN DRAPER**, Star Tribune

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At Shoreview's Island Lake Elementary School, fall is the season for America's veterans.

Fourth- and fifth-graders spent the first two months of the school year preparing for a Veterans Day concert last Wednesday that featured music celebrating America's military.

Among the songs were "Yankee Doodle," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and the anthems of each branch of the armed services.

But the students have done more than just sing. Music teacher Buffie Eicher had her students connect with veterans in the community, either in their own family or elsewhere, and bring their stories into the classroom. The veterans were then been invited to attend the concert, held at Mounds View High School.

The project is an outgrowth of one Eicher started when she was choir director at Mounds View High School. "My dad was a veteran and my brother is a veteran," she said. "It's always been an interest of mine."

Island Lake has become a school of veterans displays and mementoes. The day before the concert, one student brought in a World War II-era child's gas mask. There's a World War II Navy seaman's uniform folded up in the back of the classroom. On bulletin board walls in a hall are scores of paper stars, each representing a veteran who has connected with Island Lake in some way. There's a flag flown in Iraq and brought back by one student's father. Plus, just by talking about veterans, the kids found out that one of their own was related to national anthem composer Francis Scott Key.

"The students really caught on to this idea that, all

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of a sudden, this historical fact is not some dry, dusty thing in a book," Eicher said.

Eicher's fifth-grade music class prepared on the day before the concert by running through all their songs. Irving Berlin's "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" got a spirited rendition. She relented and allowed one verse of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic's" wacky version ("Glory, glory, hallelujah. Teacher hit me with a ruler ...").

For taps, Eicher quieted the class to reflect the melancholy spirit of the armed services' famous "lights out" anthem.

While students seemed to relish the singing, they also noted that this is not standard elementary school fare. "Some of the songs are kind of hard because they get really high [pitched]," said 10-year-old Hannah Rauch. "But we're honoring our veterans."

Eicher said she hopes what she is doing will create lasting memories that the sacrifices made by veterans came from closer to home than the student might have thought.

"Today, a fourth-grade boy came in with a picture of his great-uncle, who was 88 years old," she said. "This guy had served in World War II. This young man was so pleased and proud about this person in history who was related to him."

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