

INTERGENERATIONAL FOLK FAIR McKinley Center Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Mckinley Center planned a Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) Intergenerational Folk Fair so that the elementary students could interact with seniors and benefit from their expertise. Retired seniors volunteered to display and/or demonstrate their hobbies and interests. McKinley has always included multiple generations in student learning, and this practice brought young and old together for a day of sharing and learning about skills used today and years ago. The activity linked to school and district goals.

The Intergenerational Folk Fair was held in the gym and multi-purpose room in May. RSVP participants set up stations to demonstrate activities such as butter churning, ice cream making, rock collecting, oil painting, and woodturning. Students spent about 40 minutes visiting the stations to interact with the presenters. Prior to the Folk Fair, teachers practiced with the students how to ask informative questions such as, “How long do you have to churn before you get butter?” While some students were in the gym, others were in the multi-purpose room square dancing with the seniors.

The Intergenerational Folk Fair required the involvement of the entire staff, students, and many parent volunteers. Parents and staff volunteered to bring and serve food, help set up displays, clean up, and perform

any other tasks required for the event. Students in Safety Cadets, the Computer Club, and the Student Council helped organize and manage the Folk Fair. The Computer Club made signs to help direct the seniors to the different demonstration areas. Some students acted as “go fors” for the seniors and participated in the square dancing.

Scheduling was the major hurdle for the Folk Fair, because RSVP only visits two-three schools per year. Setting a date for the Folk Fair way in advance was crucial. Overall, the program cost about \$0.25 per student. School Enhancement Team funds were used so that the event was free for everyone.

Students found the seniors to be caring, attentive, and willing to share. They saw the direct relationship between work and product; and in some cases, the students got the added benefit of tasting the products! The seniors enjoyed the event as well. One senior exclaimed, “I wasn’t sure what to expect or even if this was something I wanted to do, but I have been so impressed by how welcomed the students made us feel and how well behaved they were that I want to do this again! I really enjoyed the day.” With such positive feedback, McKinley hopes that RSVP can fit them into their busy schedule for next year.

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