

Grandparents' Tea

*Southwood Elementary School
Windsor, Ontario Canada*

Tea, cookies, and a couple of hundred bright and giggly elementary school students made grandparents feel welcome and willing to volunteer at Southwood Elementary School. The second annual Grandparents' Tea in April drew more than 200 people and increased the school's volunteer ranks.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) came up with the idea two years ago after noticing that many grandparents were at school daily, dropping off and picking up students. They realized that the grandparents represented a volunteer army, whose potential had not been tapped. The ATP decided that a formal tea was just the event to rally the troops, and help the school meet its goal of involving more family members.

Staff began advertising the event in the school's newsletter and on its web site. The organizers also sent home invitations with a tear-off RSVP to get an idea of how many refreshments to prepare.

On the day of the event, 200 grandparents and 300 grandchildren gathered in the school's gymnasium. Teachers greeted grandparents at the door. Parents served homemade baked goods and administrators helped serve coffee and tea donated by Starbucks. An older student volunteered to play the piano.

ATP members compiled a list of volunteer activities that would help the school, teachers, and students, and invited the grandparents to sign up. They also held a raffle for a school spirit necklace—a silver charm with the motto "Spirit, Strength, Success." The students and their grandparents huddled at tables and on the school stage to play board games and to read and share stories. Many of the youngsters either read to, or demonstrated activities for, their grandparents.

"What better way to energize young minds than to give grandparents the opportunity to share with their grandchildren their own

life and school experiences?" commented the principal.

The large crowd drew the attention of the local newspaper, which published pictures of the tea.

Most grandparents raved about the event, not just for the opportunity to spend time with their grandchildren, but also for the chance to reconnect with old friends, many of whom they may not have seen since their own children attended the elementary school.

"Fabulous!" one grandparent exclaimed.

"I am amazed at how well my granddaughter can read," another said.

The event cost only \$100, thanks to the donations of food, beverages, and flowers from parents and community partners. The school held a fundraiser to cover its expenses.

Southwood plans to continue its Grandparents' Tea for many more years. The organizers hope to find a larger venue next year to accommodate the crowd. If the spring weather cooperates, they may hold it on the school's front lawn.

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