

## NEXT GENERATION

"Next Generation" features the talents of our local students and school news and updates. All schools in the Applegate Valley are encouraged to submit art, writing, photography and any other creative pieces to [gater@applegater.org](mailto:gater@applegater.org).

### APPLEGATE SCHOOL

## Applegate School garden is a community effort

Last June the Applegate school community joined hands to install an irrigation system around the historic school building.

The project got its start when the school's Garden Club members began to talk about how nice it would be *not* to have to come to the school each day throughout the summer to water the gardens that students had planted when school was in session.

Soon, wishful thinking blossomed into a full-blown project involving many people whose efforts have resulted in a completed first-class irrigation system that will, when the project is finished, mean green grass and healthy gardens around the old building.

This project has been a real team effort—classic Applegate. The historic building deserves this kind of care, and folks have really stepped up.

**Many people endured some extremely hot days** to complete the trenching and installation. Joshua Morrison, who works in the irrigation industry, was instrumental in the design and installation of the system. Joshua also was able to get all of the materials needed for the project donated by his employer, HD Fowler. Tyler Van Buskirk donated his time and equipment from his company, In Season Irrigation. Jake Lowry donated equipment and his expertise. Mac Embury donated topsoil, and plants were donated by Applegate Valley Nursery, Murphy Country Nursery, Sandy's Nursery, and Jacksonville Blue Door Garden Store.

I was proud to work alongside the many hands who braved the heat and worked hard to get this project underground: April and John Krause, Vickie and Chris DiStefano, Mathew Embury, Maggie Lowry, Fred Hall, Carrie Holloman, Janie Burstein, and Debbie Yerby. Thank you all!

Darrell Erb

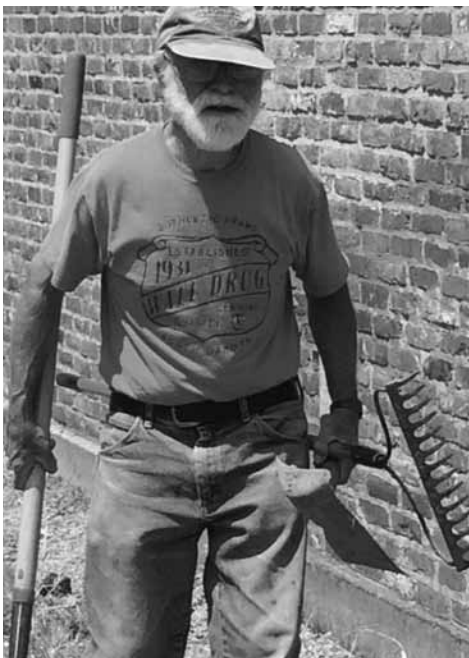
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Photos (top) Joshua Morrison helped design and install the new irrigation system. (bottom) Tyler Van Buskirk used a trenching machine from his own business.



Photos (below left) Fred Hall gave his time and energy to help complete the installation of the irrigation system. (below right) Jake Lowry takes a break after donating equipment and his expertise to the project.



## RUCH SCHOOL

## First graders become published authors at Ruch Community School

This past spring, I was asked to write an article about first graders who were writing and self-publishing their own books in Kim Neiswanger's class at Ruch Community School. Being an author myself, I jumped at the opportunity to visit these young writers. After all, it's important to check out the local competition, right?

**As part of my assignment,** I drove to the school and watched the young authors at work. I had no idea what to expect. When I arrived, the students were still at recess. Kim greeted me enthusiastically and said she would bring in the children. "What would you like the children to call you?" she asked. "Mr. Curtis, will be fine," I responded.

The first graders arrived in two neat rows. I expected them to make a beeline for their desks. Instead, they made a beeline for me. Each child walked up to me with an outstretched hand, waiting to shake mine. The kids looked me in the eye, gave a warm smile, and said, "Welcome to our class, Mr. Curtis," or "We are glad you are here." I melted. What did it matter what the children had written; they had won me over. I may have met the most polite first graders in the world.

**But the truth was,** the children had a great project going. As they settled in to write or draw illustrations for their books, I walked around and talked to them while Kim worked with individual students. The children were eager to share their tales and show me their illustrations. I learned about dragons, tigers, dinosaurs, princesses, kitties, and even robots. Apparently, Robocop was having a crisis because his batteries were low. At least that's what I thought I was told. There may have been an interpretation problem between the student's young voice and my old ears.

The class was in the second phase of its project when I visited. The students had started by brainstorming what they wanted to write about and picked up skills for idea-generation that I wouldn't learn until I was 30. At the time they were finishing up their first drafts. After my visit the students did peer reviews. "I see you have drawn a big elephant but there is no elephant in your story." Whoops. Next they did one or two rewrites. The finished product was then shipped off to a publisher in the Midwest.

Each child's work came back as a beautifully bound and illustrated book.

While in the classroom, I looked through a selection from last year. Every child's book had a cover, a title page, a copyright page, a dedication, the story, and an author's page. Imagine the children's thrill when they saw their finished books and held them in their hands. I suspect it wasn't much different from the thrill I felt when I held my first published book.

**An authors' reception** was held in June at the Ruch Branch Library adjacent to the school. The children proudly read their books to parents, school district administrators, and community members. (The authors' reception was the culmination of a whole-school celebration of writing at Ruch Community School, with local authors sharing their stories and expertise with the students.)

**The first-grade book-publishing project, now in its fourth year,** is a collaboration between Ruch Community School and the Oregon Writing Project at Southern Oregon University. Funds for publishing the books are generously donated by members of the community at Ruch School's annual PTO fundraiser. My wife, Peggy, and I have been twice to this fun event with good food and a great cause, worthy of your support. (This year's fundraiser, "A Night by the River," was at Red Lily Vineyards on Friday, August 21.)

After the children went to PE that day last spring, I stayed and chatted with Kim. As a teacher, she was brimming over with enthusiasm. "I love to write," she told me. "It is my hope that the children will develop the same enthusiasm I have." I bet they do.

Curtis Mekemson

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To view all 31 students' books (with the option to purchase any individual paperback book), visit [www.thebookpatch.com](http://www.thebookpatch.com), click on "Site Search," then search for "Neiswanger."

Photo (top) Audience listens enthusiastically to first graders reading their books. (bottom) Kim Neiswanger's class of first-grade authors proudly hold their books. Photos: Margaret della Santina.

