

Dover students and dads help build mosaic mural in honor of Chickering teacher



Wicked Local Photo by Melissa Ostrow

[Purchase this photo](#)

Joshua Winer worked with Chickering school students and staff to create a mosaic mural. On Saturday, carpenter Dan Bergeron, Joshua Winer, and Chickering school fathers Andrew Ritzer, Larry Fisch and Dean Chronopoulos, hung the mural.

Dover – November 28, 2010

After getting off the bus Monday morning and walking into school, Chickering Elementary School students were elated to see the culmination of their many weeks of creative efforts hanging on a wall in the lobby. A mosaic mural at Chickering will soon be completed as a memorial to a former reading teacher who died after a tragic car accident a little over a year ago.

The Mural, "Chickering School Grows a Garden of Readers", was inspired by Michelle Worthy. According to award-winning artist Joshua Winer, the teachers asked him to design a unique piece of art to celebrate her life. While symbolizing Worthy's nurturing of children and cultivation of readers, it would also help those who knew her so well go through the healing process.

Winer has created more than 100 murals and works of public art, from very large exterior murals for city centers to personalized murals for homes. He has worked with many area schools on other projects as well.

Art teacher Sue Pelletier discovered Winer's work in early June. With the help of the school's PTO organization, she and her colleague, Kelley Greenwald, have been instrumental in creating the piece of art with the students.

The mosaic began with children working on the mural's eight panels in their art classes. These were to be bolted together onto the wall in the front lobby. In the mural, children are reading among flowers, grass and butterflies. A "river of words" runs through the mural.

Evan Fisch, a third-grader, said it represents Worthy's beliefs that reading should not be like a race car, rocket or robot. One should not read too quickly or without feeling. According to Evan, reading should flow but "be bumpy" along the way.

While Worthy was trained academically to help those having reading difficulties, she also taught all students to visualize and articulate the words on a page. According to Megan Field, PTO Co-President and project coordinator, Worthy worked hard to bring a new program to Chickering called "Balance Literacy."

She recalled going into a classroom with Winer to ask if anyone knew what reading like a river meant. The students all raised their hands; all knew the phrase meant to read fluently. Winer had also met with all the teachers three times to figure out the mural's exact content. He then drew a sketch outlining some of Worthy's philosophies that "a book is like a waterfall" or "reading starts with just one word."



Field is quite familiar with the program and Worthy's dedication because her son was a delayed reader in first grade. She misses Worthy a great deal — not only for her teaching skill, but for her empathy in working with parents of someone who is struggling to read. "Every day she would call and say "we're going to get through this."

The mosaic mural is the culmination of the work of all students in grades K through 5. All children "touched" the actual mural at least once. Approximately 30 parent volunteers were organized to be project leaders during the school day and work with the students.

Winer explained how he started by working on the "easy" background — the river, the grass and the sky — with the youngest children. They broke mosaic tiles with a hammer (always wearing safety goggles). This demonstrated how square tiles could be used artistically.

Moving to the foreground, the older students cut glass tiles into pieces that were to be glued together and used for mirrored faces.

These mirrors would reflect light and also be a little more participatory for students walking by the mural. Worthy's own young children, Lauren, 3 years old, and Timmy, 7 years old, had previously been invited to Chickering with other members of Worthy's family and friends to play a part. Lauren helped with the face of a girl; Timmy placed red tiles on a boy's Red Sox cap.

Field noted Winer continually stressed to the kids that it was "their project." All the children rotated through the art classes, but many wanted to contribute more. They came back to school in the evening with parents and older children who had been taught by Worthy.

She said Winer was wonderful relating to kids from age 5 to 16. He worked well with children of all ages who were there "to implant their own creative touch."

Throughout it all, Field feels privileged to be part of the undertaking. She is genuinely amazed at the "outpouring of volunteerism." She added that the mural is meant not only to honor Worthy, but to thank all teachers, past, present and future, for their efforts in conveying the message of reading, literacy and learning. She has put together a video of the process, and was touched on Monday when children finally saw the mural hanging on the wall: "They loved the out-of-the-box experience." And, they always knew just what colors to use.

