



Joshua Thomas

The images above show several details of the mosaic.

Making mosaic together

Visiting artist, students place tile over substance

By JOSHUA THOMAS
C-S-E Editor

CANAJOHARIE — With the help of a visiting, resident artist, Joshua Winer, of Boston, 140 seventh and eighth grade Canajoharie students have been constructing a colorful, meaningful mosaic for the past two weeks. When complete, the massive piece of art will be installed near the office of the Canajoharie Middle School.

While the mosaic is beautiful and eye catching, it's also constructed to remind students of numerous character qualities they are encouraged to strive for, including honesty, responsibility, respect, sharing and hope. The center of the mosaic is a depiction of the Celtic tree of life, of which teacher Michelle Egelston said, "so many things can be related to the tree."

Surrounding the tree is a ring containing the character traits, which students study during a 20 minute, daily character education session. Each of the corners is adorned with a scene representing the four seasons.

Students, along with parent and grandparent volunteers, began the mosaic last Sunday evening, and Egelston stated, "this has been our best project so far." On Wednesday, the mosaic was bolted to the wall, as it was moving ahead of schedule thanks to volunteers willing to stay late.

Kids have also been coming in during periods adjacent to art classes, and Egelston said that teachers have been very understanding and supportive. Because of the location of the mosaic's creation, in the class room across from the middle school office, teachers have been stopping in every day to view the piece as it nears completion. Seeing it come together "is very rewarding," said Egelston, adding, "and the best part is that the kids are loving it."

This is the first time the Canajoharie students have created a mosaic, and Egelston said "everything's just gone so smoothly," explaining that once the process began, it was easy to get parent volunteers involved, as the artistic piece attracted people.

Winer provided the supplies, and the kids cut the pieces of glass. The mosaic tiles, of which there will be between 6-



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Visiting artist Joshua Winer hands Lauren Balfe some grout.



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From the left: Gordon Trahan, Travis Colegrove, Brianna Slater and Lauren Balfe.

7,000 in the completed piece, have been obtained from places all around the world, including one textured blue piece

from France. There are different processes by which each piece of the mosaic was created, and on Tuesday, kids were hard

at work applying grout, which was done over a three day period. The mosaic contains numerous custom grout colors. "It's a lot of work," said Egelston.

Winer has really enjoyed his two weeks in town, stating that his visit has been "wonderful." Of the piece, he said, "I think it's very nice, and the process has been great. The kids have been terrific and Mrs. Egelston has been a wonderful supporter of the project," noting that she's been "very positive," and has provided many ideas not only about the look of the mosaic, but about the mosaic's creation and design.

On Tuesday, kids worked to fill the cracks of the Celtic tree with colored grout, changing the appearance of the piece to "give it a more polished look," according to Winer, explaining that the grout also "gives it more color and makes it stronger." It also smoothes out the rough edges of the tile.

Seventh grade student Morgan Koelbl said that she really "liked putting all the tiles down the best, because you have to cut it in an exact spot to make it all fit together." She stated that the creation process has been harder than she expected, as, "I thought we'd just have to put tiles in, I didn't know we had to grout it all," although she said that grouting has also been a joyous portion of the mosaic's creation.

The sun located on the summer corner of the piece is her favorite, as she said, "summer, in general, is my favorite season and I like all the bright colors of the sun."

Koelbl said she looks forward to being able to see the completed piece of art every day. "It's really beautiful and it's all come together," she said.

The creation of the mosaic has been supported by the Parent Teacher Association, along with a New York State Alliance For Arts and Education Grant, which has provided funding for big projects for five consecutive years. "We're already thinking about next year's project," said Egelston, who noted that the grant provides money for materials and the resident artist, who she said "is so good at it, because he's done so many large projects," as he's been involved in the creation of between 20 and 25 mosaics around the world.