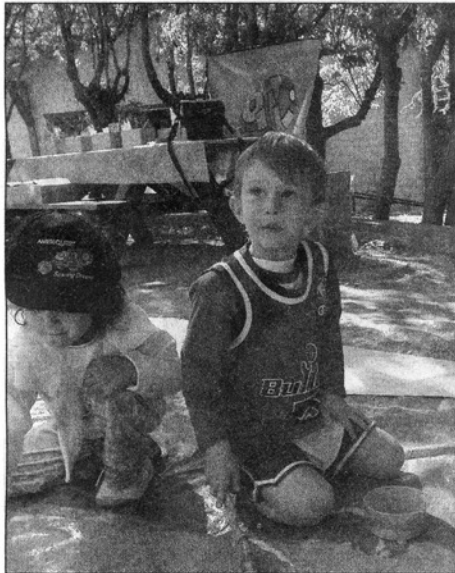


Palisadian-Post

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Postcard



LOOK, UP IN THE SKY: Palisades Jewish Early Childhood Center students Jenna Ross and Felix Massey help paint panels for the Portraits of Hope blimp which will debut next month. (See story, page 12.) Photo: Courtesy of Portraits of Hope.



Left to right: Palisades Jewish Early Childhood Center preschoolers Mendel Cunin, Sammy Müller, Gil Cohen and Amelia Kaveladze paint a panel which will eventually cover Portrait of Hope's Soaring Dreams blimp. Photo: Laura Witsenhausen

Blimp Painting Project Comes to the Palisades

By LAURA WITSENHAUSEN, Associate Editor

Palisadian Ed Massey, head of Portraits of Hope, brought his large-scale painting project home to the Palisades on February 3. The project, Soaring Dreams, a huge blimp co-sponsored by Ameriquest Mortgage Company which is painted by children with colorful, geometric shapes, will debut over the Santa Monica Pier on March 30.

Palisades Jewish Early Childhood Center preschoolers and Marquez School third graders each painted pieces of the blimp earlier this month. Massey started Portraits of Hope with his brother Bernie in 1995. One of their major local projects is the Tower of Hope on Olympic in Beverly Hills, an oil rig covered with flowers all painted by hospitalized children.

Hospitalized children also participated in painting the blimp, as well as children involved in afterschool programs such as the Boys' and Girls' Club. Participants lived in four states—California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico—and ranged in age from preschoolers to teenagers.

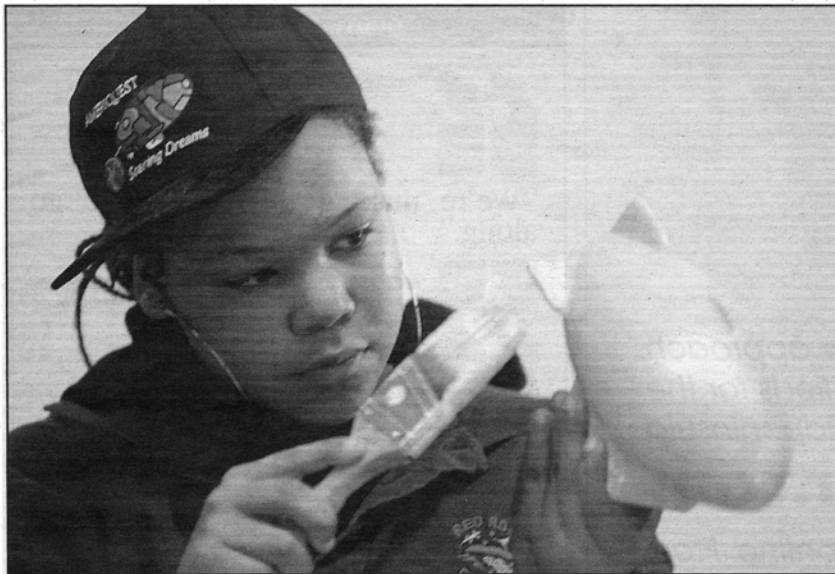
Each of the 5,000 participants received a blimp-shaped bank to paint and then went to work, with the help of volunteers on painting single-colored panels in bright shades—totaling 40,000 square feet of painted surfaces. Volunteers bring all the equipment—paint, brushes and music—to the children. Hospitalized children who are wheelchair-bound use a special telescope brush to paint their sections. Other children who are unable to paint with their hands use a special shoe paintbrush or a fruit-flavored paintbrush that is held between their teeth.

"They learn about reaching for goals," Massey said. "It shows the impossible can be done. How great for these kids to be part of a spectacular and historic accomplishment, and part of something that is bigger than themselves."

A native of the Palisades, Massey left the area with his family when he was a child. He recently moved back to the community with his wife, Dawn, also a native Palisadian. In fact the couple were neighbors when they were both preschoolers and met again years later. Now they live above the Village with their two young children, Felix, 4, a Palisades Jewish Early Childhood Center student, and Georgie, 1.

Older children involved in the program write out goal cards. Ameriquest reads the cards and selects children in each region who will have an opportunity to fly on the airship.

Currently the painted panels are being installed on the blimp. Youngsters will also be able to see the blimp when it flies over the Angels—Dodgers game on April 3.



Nicholas Wright

Romniesha Morris paints a ceramic blimp at the 49er Academy for a project that encourages young students to follow their dreams.

Blimp

(continued from page 3)

Ameriquet Soaring Dreams Airship.

"The key to this particular program is for the kids to dream big," said Ed Massey, Portraits of Hope founder. "When it's on a television show or a news clip, the kids will see it and be able to say they did it."

Students from the 49er Academy, who represented just one of the 70 schools and hospitals from states in the Southwest, will have their artwork showcased on the airship, which is five times the size of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. After the blimp debuts in Southern California this spring, it will then broadcast the Oakland Athletics games this baseball season.

The project, which is the third of its kind, is a sponsorship between Portraits of Hope, a nonprofit art therapy organization, and Ameriquet Mortgage.

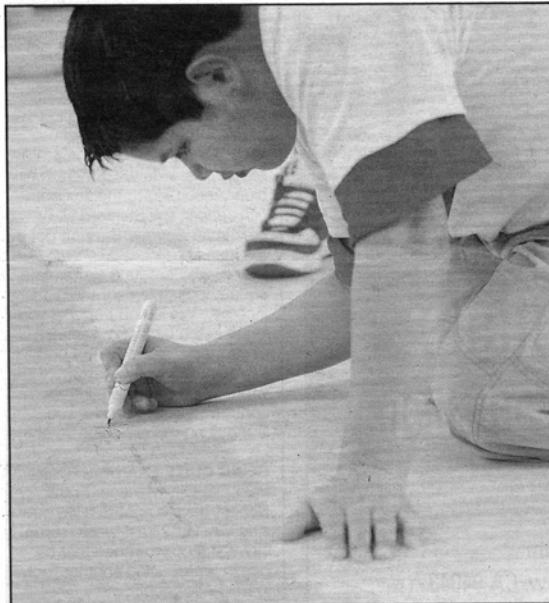
"No dream is too big. Don't let anyone ever tell you that you can't do something," said Portraits of Hope Program Director Chaya Greisman, who was smaller than most of the students, but delivered her message with a loud and clear voice.

"This is not just any blimp. This is the biggest blimp in the world. Imagine that! Our dreams can soar if we work hard," she added.

The airship project involved more than 6,000 children, from Arlington, Texas to Albuquerque, N.M. to East Palo Alto. The children from each site painted different shaped "panels" — the largest being a 65-by-65 foot square — which will eventually be mounted onto the blimp. The 49er Academy students painted a 20-by-20 foot panel light blue.

"We work with a lot of after-school programs and disadvantaged youth," said Susan Nassberg, a spokeswoman for Portraits of Hope. "It's important to show kids, that regardless of the situation they're in, they can accomplish the impossible and they're a part of something other kids aren't doing, a part of something special."

A traveling team of six Portrait of



Nicholas Wright

Vincente Aguilera signs his name on the giant sticker that will end up decorating the exterior of the blimp.

Hope artists began visiting the sites in August, shuttling the huge panels to each location. The 49er Academy was the group's 63rd stop.

After writing down their goals, each student was armed with a paint brush and a small cup of light blue paint.

They crowded around the panel and finished painting in just a few minutes.

Davion Douglas, 11, wearing a baggy T-shirt over his school clothes so they wouldn't get damaged, continued to put the finishing touches on one corner of the panel. The sixth-grader paints and draws regularly in his personal art book.

"You can come up with any creation while you think," he said. "This is a good project because all the kids are putting their effort into it."

The first Portraits of Hope project was the Tower of Hope in Los Angeles — which is taller than the Statue of Liberty — painted by

thousands of hospitalized children and their families.

The second was done in conjunction with NASA and the First Flight Centennial Celebration. This time, the children involved painted a DC-3 sport plane from the 1930s.

A fourth project — to be tackled after the blimp — involves the tops of more than 10,000 New York City taxi cabs.

The students at the 49er Academy signed their names around the panel and Portraits of Hope quickly packed up to head toward their next location.

What the students didn't know, however, is that a panel of judges from Ameriquet Mortgage plans to review the goals and select a few of the best responses.

The kids chosen will get to ride in the Soaring Dreams Airship when it flies over the Bay Area.

For more information, visit www.soaringdreams.org. ■