

NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

Pumpkins and murals at ROCS

BY KIM NEISWANGER

Community connection is an integral part of Ruch Outdoor Community School (ROCS).

In October, our kindergarten through fifth-grade students connected with our community in an exciting way with a hands-on visit to Hyde Farm. As ROCS's second-grade teacher, I have dreamed about creating a pumpkin patch at the school for the students to tend. Then, at harvest time, they could enjoy the fruits of their labor. We already have a robust school garden thanks to White Oak Farm, so one would think we could add to that and have our own pumpkin patch. However, as we quickly realized, a lot goes into creating a pumpkin patch. It's not very feasible, at this time, to have an entire pumpkin patch at our school.

If we couldn't have our own patch, we could look to our community for help. We didn't have to look far because our school librarian, Susie Hyde, and her family operate nearby Hyde Farm, where they sell corn and pumpkins. It was a perfect fit! Joe and Susie Hyde generously offered their pumpkin patch to facilitate student learning. To prepare the farm for visitors, popcorn balls had to be made, tables had to be set up, and, of course, 136 pumpkins had to be picked. Joe led the students on a hayride to pick pumpkins, and Susie offered gourds and other fall nature items for printmaking. Kids had a snack of cider and popcorn balls and played games with pumpkins. It was an experience they will never forget!

At the end of the season in October, the second-grade class helped Hyde Farm harvest pumpkin seeds to be planted for next year's harvest and pumpkin-patch experience. It will be fun for the students to pick a pumpkin grown from the seeds they harvested, and it will help the farm generate more revenue by selling the pumpkins to the community.

Another great experience in October involved our connection with Britt Education & Engagement. Retired principal Julie Barry, who had a passion for providing music and arts in our school, had long wanted a project for students to create a mural on our campus under the



The finished mural at ROCS, which all students could help paint, "honors the tribal land we are on," says artist Ursula Barton, who oversaw the project.



ROCS students enjoy a hayride at the pumpkin patch at Hyde Farm, where they snacked on popcorn balls and played games with pumpkins.

direction of an artist. A few years ago, she connected with Kay Hilton, Britt's director of education and engagement,

who oversees a free education program that connects students with artists or musicians. It was another perfect match.

The program was delayed a few years due to the pandemic, but Mr. King, our current principal, scheduled an artist's visit to ROCS. It was worth the wait because our school was paired with the amazing artist Ursula Barton, a graduate of Pacific Northwest College of Art and a freelance visual artist and muralist who focuses on painting urban landscapes and ink life drawings and portraits. Her work is inspired by her many bike rides across the bridges of Portland, Oregon. When one of the students asked Ursula how she came up with the idea for our mural, she said, "I wanted to honor the tribal land we are on. The salmon and oak trees depict food that was a big part of the Native Americans' life."

All students could participate in painting the mural. Kindergarten through second-grade students had fun throwing paint-filled balloons at the wall to create the vibrant background. After that, third-through eighth-grade students painted the creatures and plants you would find in the river. Ursula finished the masterpiece by adding salmon under a canopy of oak trees. When the completed mural was unveiled there were many oohs and ahhs as the salmon seemed to come to life!

Mr. King pointed out that our campus has many murals on it. "I like to say we color our campus with art from local artists," he says. It is an inspiration for our students to walk about campus and see all the different interpretations of the land around us. It is amazing how many local artists we have who are willing to donate their time and talents to making our campus a beautiful place to be. This mural with Ursula is no exception. Students will return to the school long after they have graduated and be able to say, "I helped paint that."

Pumpkin seeds and paint—what incredible October fun we had at ROCS.

This year's holiday program, "Twas the Night Before Break, is at 6 pm December 15. The community is invited to attend.

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