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Students learn importance of 'everyday heroes'

By Sara E. Martin, Army Flier Staff Writer

The gymnasium at Fort Rucker Primary School was filled with students and staff wearing red, white and blue to celebrate Hero Day Sept. 11.

Sept. 11 is recognized as Hero Day at the primary school to celebrate everyday heroes. The special area teachers have been teaching a unit on everyday heroes because the school does not emphasize the remembrance of 9/11 as the children are too young, said Sylvia Thornton, music teacher and publicity officer Fort Rucker Primary.

"We don't say September 11th or talk about it because of the age of the children. We just talk about heroes, specifically community heroes," said Shaney Shaffer, educational technologist.

The students have been introduced to books and photos educating them on real-life heroes and the they all drew pictures of their favorite heroes, which were displayed on a Hero Wall down the front stretch of hallway.

"[The teachers] talk about how important it is to recognize our everyday heroes. The importance for us is to relate to them what real heroes do. They are not on TV like celebrities or in the movies; they are real, breathing people that help others," said Janet Amuso, media specialist.

The children have been introduced to the idea that heroes might not even see themselves as heroes.

"We learned that real heroes are neither Batman nor Captain America, but real heroes are everyday people who help other people. They may have started out their day not thinking that they were special, but by the end of it they proved themselves to be real heroes," said Thornton.

Several teachers held a question and answer session over the week with their students about who is their favorite hero and why, what makes a hero, as well as relating to the children who their favorite hero was and why.

Many of the children picked their mom or dad as their favorite hero, others picked Soldiers, doctors, and firemen, while a creative few picked service dogs, plumbers and dolphin scientists.

"It's our priority to instill in [the children] the recognition that those people such as nurses and police are real heroes that often don't get recognized as heroes" said nurse Debbie Doggett.

Kenny Loggins' "Highway to the Danger Zone" played during a video while astronauts, police, farmers, doctors, firefighters and Soldiers were depicted on the screen demonstrating everyday real life heroes, and Brandon Johnson, a first grader, acted as prime reporter interviewing fellow students about their everyday heroes.

The special guest speaker was Sgt. Keith C. Aamodt, military police investigator, and Detective Holly Patterson. The team members brought different equipment with them, like guns, tasers, handcuffs and bullet proof vests, to demonstrate to the children how they are everyday heroes. The students were particularly impressed with Aamodt's handcuffs, letting out a collective "whoa" when he displayed them.

"When we put on these vests we become like Superman. It keeps us safe and we have to stay safe to keep you safe," said Aamodt.

Patterson encouraged the students to shoot for the stars if they want to become everyday heroes.

"You can be any type of hero you want when you grow up, but you can be a hero now if you help others," she said. Children were also encouraged to see their parents as heroes.

"At the end of the week we send the deployed parents a little package that demonstrates what their child has learned about heroes, like them serving abroad," said Yve Esteves-Hurst, Spanish instructor, adding that at first most of the children named "The Avengers" as their personal heroes, but soon learned the difference between make-believe heroes and real heroes.

Col. Brian D. Bennett, 1st Aviation Brigade commander, and his wife, Amy, stopped to show support for the program. Bennett, who related that his hero is his wife, complemented the teacher's task of schooling the children to recognize everyday heroes.

"I think it is important for them to recognize everyday heroes, because it's our heroes that are a part of our legacy, our history and have done so much for us. It shows them that heroes don't have to be anything extraordinary, that they are just people who do their jobs every day by making a difference," he said.



Photo by Sara E. Martin

Col. Brian D. Bennett, Investigator and D.A.R.E. officer Sgt. Keith Aamodt and Detective Holly Patterson thank the Fort Rucker Primary School ambassadors for hosting them.