

## OUR STORIES

# Horace Mann goodwill ambassadors



*Horace Mann interpreters (left to right) Amanda Myer, Heather Muller and Danni Miller, greet third-grader Ripley Fullam (center). (Photo/Jill Drury, Dayton Public Schools)*

Fifteen minutes is not a long time. But at Horace Mann PreK-6, it is the perfect amount of time for three school interpreters to make everyone's day a little brighter. Amanda Myer, Heather Muller and Danni Miller take it upon themselves several days a week to welcome students in the morning or send them home in the afternoon with a wave and a smile. They have a weekly schedule, and no matter which day or what time, the trio share inspiring messages on trusty chalkboards.

On one Friday afternoon, they stepped outside their school at 2:10 p.m. and immediately greeted waiting parents with a grand, "Happy Friday!" The happiness was clearly contagious. A sea of smiles was returned and their mission of cheer was underway. They walked down the sidewalk toward their chosen high-profile spot on the corner where they can wave at the most people as they pull into the school parking lot to pick up their children. Car horns honked, parents waved and read the messages offered from the three goodwill ambassadors.

“Saying hello and waving just puts people in a good mood,” Heather Muller said. “We send them off smiling and hope they start their weekends off right.”

The chosen messages for the chalkboards are a result of brainstorming sessions or suggestions made by other staff members. The theme on this particular day was the movies. Muller’s message came via Dory, the forgetful fish, who says, “just keep swimming,” while Miller’s message read, “My hands are in the air like I just do not care,” from “Home,” and Myer chose the feel-good catchphrase from “The Lion King,” “Hakuna matata!” The instantly recognizable phrases had parents and children alike laughing, joking, and in some cases, dancing around.

“Parents just enjoy it and appreciate that they are out here putting a smile on all the kids’ faces,” parent

Starr Howard said. As she expressed her appreciation, her daughter, Ripley, was busy hugging each school greeter. One parent who passed by



*Parent Emily Ralston (left) shows off her matching tattoo alongside Danni Miller’s sign (right) (Photo/Jill Drury, Dayton Public Schools)*

showed off her tattoo of Oh, the alien from “Home,” that matched the drawing on Miller’s chalkboard.

This is the first year for their goodwill project, but all three staffers feel strongly that their efforts are paying off.

“When we first started, especially in the mornings, some of the parents would be a little grumpy, but after a while, they couldn’t help but smile and play along,” said Muller. “It also helps us get to know all the students. We know all of their names and they are starting to know us. Some will pass us in the hall and say, ‘hey that’s the lady from outside.’” We’re just trying to pay it forward with these kids and put them in a good mood.”

Danni Miller agrees.

“We know all the kids by name now. As interpreters, we’re not in their classrooms all day, but they now know who we are and say hello in the hallway.”

Principal Megan Winston believes the trio’s cheer does more than put smiles on parents’ faces. She too, joins in the fun on occasion, passing out cookies and candy as parents wait for the afternoon school bell to ring.

“We understand that the parents can sometimes get a little frustrated having to wait in a long line to pick up their children. A lot of them are busy mothers with little time, so I think they appreciate it,” Principal Winston said. “It also gives us the chance to meet with parents that we might not see otherwise.”

All three greeters have been working as interpreters at Horace Mann for at least three years or more. It is their job to interpret teachers’ lessons for the 14 deaf students who are enrolled there. They interpret for the children whether it is in the classroom, at lunch or on the playground.

The idea to become school greeters came from a man they’ve never met, but see often. He, too, is a greeter, not at Horace Mann, but waving at motorists who pass by the intersection of Far Hills Avenue and Alex-Bell Road in Washington Twp. Myers says she used to drive past him every morning on her way to work and there he’d be, holding inspirational signs and wishing only good things for passersby.

“We’re not doing this for attention,” Muller said. “At first, I hesitated when Amanda (Myer) told me we were going to do this story. I just want to create a happy environment for everyone.”

Fifteen minutes later, at 2:25 p.m., all the students were happily on their way home, and parents, grandparents and guardians gave one last honk of the car horn and one more wave as they pulled from the parking lot.

“One small act of kindness has a huge impact,” Myer said.