

## FAIRVIEW PARK

# First-graders learn while helping animal shelter

By **BRIAN LOVE**

A project at Gilles-Sweet Elementary School teaches a lot about life, as well as reading, writing and arithmetic.

And it's for first-graders.

The first-grade team of Nicole Prunte, Sarah Eppler, Megan Lamb, Melissa Koenig and Valerie Garcia were trying to come up with lesson plans that would pique their students' interest late in the school year. It's tough for students and teachers since the year is winding down and the days seem to drag.

Then, it hit them. A project that would benefit the kids academically while helping an animal shelter. The class began a partnership with Berea Animal Rescue Fund (ARF). It started slowly last spring, but this year the program really took off.

Since about April 1, students have been collecting items that will be donated to the appropriately named ARF, which is a no-time-limit shelter in Columbia Station.

Examples are in the hallway near the first-grade rooms. Box after box sits under student-made posters. Bags of dog and cat food are flanked by cat litter, cans, toys, blankets, treats and any other item.

"We were always working with our partnership just trying to help those kiddos build those empathetic skills," Eppler said. "We want them to reach out into the community and understand that the world is bigger than your house, our classroom, this school. We want them to reach out into the community and do something for others, show empathy."

ARF provided each student with a photo of a cat or dog. The students researched information and then wrote about it on posters of their animals. They also researched how to care for a pet, and these were placed on their See-Saw account, which allows families to view their children's work.

"Some of my kiddos have written their own scripts to do an announcement to remind the other students in the building to make a donation," Eppler said.

For math, the students will eventually tally all of the donations and make bar graphs.

"It's a service learning project, Principal Matt Krivak said. "The goal of the service learning project is to find a way for the students to be able to give back to their community. They've been seeking out (and) collecting all kinds of different items



Photo by Brian Love

**Nicole Prunte, Sarah Eppler, Megan Lamb, Melissa Koenig and Valerie Garcia help animals while teaching the curriculum to their students at Gilles-Sweet Elementary School last year.**

that the animals need at the shelter — things like litter, treats, food, toys, little blankets, all these different items."

It will come to an end Friday when the students and teachers visit the shelter. The students will get to meet the animals they researched. .

Eppler said the shelter is setting up a tent for another event, but said it will be used if the weather is not suitable.

"ARF is so thankful for the support of Gilles-Sweet Elementary first grade class," Executive Director Steven Crone said in a statement. "Because of their kindness and caring for rescue companion animals, we can supply cats with toys and treats and dogs with blankets and biscuits. It is such a pleasure to work with Gilles-Sweet school and connect families with ARF's no-time limit mission."

And one student asked an important question: What if his animal was no longer there?

"I told them, it's good," Eppler said. "That means that pet is now at its forever home. The kiddos were all very happy with that."

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