



PressFriends, a project of Community Partners made up of 21 Miraleste Intermediate School students, hosted a news writing camp last week. The sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students mentored third, fourth, and fifth grade Peninsula students, giving them helpful training on writing, interviewing and online resources.

Pen in Hand: Kids mentor Kids

By Rebecca Villaneda, Peninsula News
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Last week, PressFriends, a student-run community project guided by adults, hosted a week long news writing camp instilling in younger kids that the written word is powerful and fun.

The culmination of the weeklong camp was a 16-page newspaper that featured interviews with Rolling Hills Estates and Palos Verdes Estates mayors, Rancho Palos Verdes mayor pro tem and other city leaders.

PressFriends, mostly made up of Dapplegray Elementary alumni, used their Dapplegray Times experience to show third- through fifth-grade PV students what kinds of questions to ask in an interview, the benefits of details and where to find reliable sources online.

"They're kind of like role models for them and they seem to really be having a fun time," said Michael Barb, Palos Verdes Library District Young Readers' librarian, who helped oversee the camp. "They've turned it into a lot of group activities, and the whole point I think, ultimately, is for them to be able to work on this newsletter for their schools, and they are producing this version of one, just based on the event of this week."

Incoming Miraleste Intermediate eighth-grader and PressFriends President Luke Southwell said news writing in school provides a nice break from reports of historic people or events.

"I think it's cool to write about things that are going to come out and things that happen," he said.

Throughout the week, the older writers taught the younger students how to compose fashion and music reviews and guided them while they were writing.

“They wrote everything,” Southwell said. “We’ve taught them new ways to write and new ways to think about writing. Like yesterday, we did a game and we would give them an item, like a glass dolphin, and then we asked them to describe it as many ways as they could just to have them think about more ways they could write about things.”

Malynn Hogan, the teacher adviser for PressFriends brought her children, Shioka and Kosei, to the camp to better appreciate the skill set.

“It shows them writing could be fun — it’s not something to fear; it’s something to enjoy and there are a lot of different ways that they can express themselves and reasons for expressing themselves,” Hogan said.

Southwell’s parents, Carl and Debora, also have been a running force behind PressFriends. Their daughter, Tessa, an incoming sixth-grader at Miraleste also is on board with the project, acting as the PressFriends secretary.

“We thought it was good for the kids that were mentors ... It helped them formulate what goes into putting together a newspaper in their minds, because when you teach something you have to reflect on it more and get a better understanding of it,” Carl said. “And at the same time it helped them have a little bit [of] experience as a teacher.”

Aside from teaming up with kids on the Hill, PressFriends also lent their infectious admiration for writing to Roosevelt Elementary School in Lawndale.

The group of 21 visited Roosevelt twice a month during this last school year and helped navigate students into starting their own newspaper. The students produced about four issues for the Lawndale school.

“I think it’s nice helping other kids learn how to write and make their own newspapers — it’s fun,” Tessa said.

“I really like teaching little kids ... and working with little kids,” said Tyler Barnett, a former Dapplegray Times editor. “It teaches them how to be a [newspaper person] ... and they know the basics and then they are ready to move on to bigger and better and harder things, and this can help them to know how to write a music review and fashion reviews.”

After the success of working with Roosevelt, PressFriends hopes to branch out to more Lawndale schools, or perhaps the Long Beach Unified School District, and to team up with more PV schools.

“The idea of the press and the idea of having objective information disseminated to the community are important ideas that have to survive, and we want the kids to learn about those early [on], and also writing helps them with literacy ... It helps put a meaning to reading and writing that’s just beyond sitting there with books in a classroom,” Carl said. “I’ve noticed that people don’t read newspapers and things are changing ... I just don’t want the concept to ever go away, because it’s one of our most important concepts.”

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