

## Virtual field trip is a magic carpet ride



Students prepare to make a Kachina doll with Ms. Shabazz.



Making a Kachina doll requires good listening skills.



Students proudly display their Kachina dolls.

Laurie Molnar's fifth graders recently visited The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta – without ever leaving Summit Academy Lorain Elementary School – thanks to the school's new video conferencing unit. The units were purchased with federal entitlement money from the 2008-09 school year.

Seated around a large conference table in comfortable swivel chairs, the students could have easily been mistaken for a junior corporate board of directors. But these students had a entirely different mission – to learn about and make a Hopi Kachina doll puppet.

The Center for Puppetry Arts provided a staff member named Ms. Shabazz to take the students on their virtual field trip. In the Lorain classroom, a flat screen monitor is equipped with a moveable camera so that the students could see and hear Ms. Shabazz and Ms. Shabazz could see and hear them.

"Everyone say Ka-chi-na," Ms. Shabazz said with enthusiasm.

"Ka-chi-na," the class responded.

"Say it with personality: Ka-chi-na!" Ms. Shabazz said.

"KA-CHI-NA!" the class responded with lots of personality.

Each student had a set of paper, glue, scissors and a cardboard cylinder with which to make his or her own kachina doll. As Ms. Shabazz showed them where to cut and curl and glue, she told the history of Native American dolls and wove in facts about the food, customs and clothes of the Woodland, Plains and Southwest tribes.

At the end of the program, the students were holding finished Kachina dolls, which Ms. Shabazz then lead the students in a Kachina rain dance.

"My students really enjoy the distance learning experience," said Mrs. Molnar. "They enjoy talking with someone via the telecommunications they see used on the TV screen. The students were amazed when they realized the speaker could also see them and what they were doing. We have participated in two distant learning labs and they were fascinated and excited for both of them. The first distant learning experience was a food chain/web and the second was based on Native Americans. They stated they enjoyed the Native American distant learning more because of the hands-on experience."

Instructional Assistant Carlota Derifaj agreed.

"Something hands-on for the kids is very good," she said. "They get excited about that."

The students were already talking about what they would like to learn on future virtual field trips:

Gabriel Monticue: "The human body."

Mariah McGuire: "Experiments on animals."

Brian Moulder: "About atoms."

Aaron Huff: "Organs of the body."

Brian Mowery: "Experiments with dry ice."

Makai Coleman: "Bones."

James Brown: "Dry ice."

Brittany Rathwell: "The human body."

Dominique Delvalle: "How to fly."

Ryan Winters: "Construction."

Geoffrey Boone: "The human body."

Jackie Beltran: "Social studies."

Chief Technology Officer Jim Bostic said the videoconferencing possibilities are limitless.

"Virtual field trips, professional development activities for teachers, community outreach – the applications are limited only by what we have not thought of yet," Bostic said. "As interactive white boards now populate every classroom, someday so will the video conferencing opportunity."

# Teleparent makes the connection between school and parents



Director Rachel Murphy and secretary Donna Blocher demonstrate the new Teleparent system.

The newest tool in Summit Academy's communication tool box is Teleparent, a web-based dialing system that allows schools to more effectively stay in touch with their students' parents and guardians.

Summit Academy Secondary School Canton Director Rachel Murphy is enthusiastic about the system's capabilities.

"With the previous dialer system, we had to type up the message and send it to someone else and they had to record it and then it would go out," she explained. "But we wouldn't get any information back about who answered the call or what time it went out. We just hoped it got where it needed to go and that was all."

"With Teleparent, we have a lot more control over it," Mrs. Murphy added. "We're the ones who record the message so when

parents get the phone call, they recognize our voices, which is nice."

School secretary Donna Blocher noted that after the calls have been made, a computer program tabulates the results.

"It will tell you who didn't answer, perhaps the number is disconnected," Mrs. Blocher said. "It tells you everything that happened."

Recently, the school held a fund raiser and all of the materials were due back on Monday. Teleparent was set up to call Friday evening and to remind the students and their parents to send back their orders and money.

"It worked out real well," Mrs. Blocher said. "You can use it for anything you want. If the school has to close due to no power or no water, or if there's a snow day, or a PTST meeting, you can use it for anything."

Mrs. Murphy said they are looking forward to using the system to do parent surveys.

"We just had parent-teacher conferences and we changed the way we did them. So we thought about doing a survey to parents to see how they like the new system better than the old system."

The system allows users to separate phone calls into groups.

"So for instance, if we wanted to send a message about an upcoming field trip, we would send it to just the group who needs it. We also have all our staff in the system, so we can call and alert staff to certain things."

Parents say they like the new system because they recognize the voices and know it is not a phone solicitor.

"They said they recognize our voices, so they listen," Mrs. Blocher said.

"It's awesome," Mrs. Murphy added.

Jim Bostic, Summit Academy Management's Chief Technology Officer, agreed.

"We hope this tool helps our schools on a daily basis," Bostic said. "We continue to search for effective items which will help our schools better serve their children, families and educational staff."

## Summit Academy Welcomes Director of Human Resources

On Monday, November 16, Tracy Smejkal joined Summit Academy Management as Director of Human Resources.

She is a graduate of Baldwin Wallace College, where she majored in Human Services. Prior to Summit Academy, Tracy worked in Human Resources for the Visiting Nurses Association of Cleveland.

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Tracy Smejkal