

Woodbury Middle School Students Spreading Kindness With Ben's Bells Initiative

March 13, 2023 – A small group of Woodbury Middle School students walked to the Post Office on a recent morning to drop off a special gift. It's not a letter to be mailed; but a token of kindness they hung in a tree on the green across the street.



It is a Ben's Bell, a small copper cow bell with a dangling ceramic flower and accompanying message of intentional kindness – "You have found a Ben's Bell. Take it home, hang it and remember to spread kindness throughout our world."

These Woodbury Middle School students hope that their small gesture - a symbol of kindness and its power in healing -- will help make their community a gentler place to live.

"I think the bell is a really good way to spread kindness," said eighth grader Addison Bushka, who added that walking as a group to hang their Ben's Bell was a great idea. "I hope that someone who finds this bell passes on the kindness it inspires."

Woodbury Middle School is partnering with Ben's Bells this year to support the Warrior Way and to foster an inclusive and accepting school culture. Twenty-five bells were gifted to WMS by the Ben's Bells studio in Bethel as part of the work the school is doing on intentional kindness and building an inclusive culture.

This week, each multi-grade Family group was given a Ben's Bell and were tasked with finding a special place in the community in which to place it.

Library Media Specialist Aimee Shuhart arranged the drop off of the Ben's Bells in WMS Family groups this week and worked with her own group of Family to find the best place to hang their special bell in town.

"We brainstormed a few places but decided the Post Office green would be the most visible place for it," said Shuhart who decided a whole group walk to hang the bell would be a



memorable experience for the students. “Ben’s Bells are intended to be found or discovered in unexpected public places. The finder can either bring the bell home or pass on the kindness by hanging in a different location.”

Seventh grader Lila Farrelly said she thinks placing the bells throughout the community spreads joy and will surely spark a contagious kindness. “My hope is that when someone finds one of these bells, it makes their day and if they take it home, they feel better,” Farrelly said.

Phoenix Celello said she recently found a Ben’s Bell hanging at Hollow Park so she knows the joy the initiative can bring to a finder. “It made me feel really happy when I saw it,” said Celello, an eighth grader in Shuhart’s Family. “That’s what the Ben’s Bells initiative is really all about. It’s been hard for everyone lately and we all need a little reason to be kind. I hope that the person who finds our Ben’s Bell is someone who really needs it.”

Sixth grader Emma Pratt agreed. “I hope the person who finds this bell and reads the note knows they are really worth something,” Pratt said.

The 24 additional bells will be hung around Woodbury and Bethlehem in various locations chosen by each WMS Family group.

The all-school Ben’s Bells initiative began in January at WMS. It included a lesson during school counseling monthly lessons on the origin and purpose of Ben’s Bells and how the founder turned a tragic event in her own life into a worldwide kindness initiative. Students also created kindness chains that are on display near the Support Services suite and decorated small signature Ben’s Bells “Be Kind” paper flowers to hang throughout the school. Throughout the rest of the school year, the middle school community will learn and implement additional strategies to grow the practice of kindness at school and beyond.

WMS School Counselor Andie Rocco said the overarching goal of bringing the Ben’s Bells initiative to school was for students to understand the importance of a kind note or gesture and to start 2023 off on the right foot. “It is our goal to create a culture of kindness, and this project encompasses the essence of just that, which is why we felt it was perfect for WMS,” Rocco said. “We are so grateful to Aimee Shuhart for taking the foundational lesson we provided to the next level with the Family bell hanging.”