

By Erich Thurow, Chairman D200 Education Foundation (February 3)

Is it ever too soon to teach children to give back? Amy Mock, Kindergarten teacher at Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center would argue that it's not too soon to teach Kindergarteners. Amy applied for a grant from the District 200 Education Foundation this year for a project she called "Giving Back" and she and her class of 23 students are in the middle of a project that will likely give back more than triple the \$450 that they were given this fall.

For the fifth year, Ms. Mock's class is raising money and goods to support three very worthwhile causes in our community. The students raised \$323 in December by selling hot cocoa and cookies to the staff and to families of students. The students purchased the cookies and cocoa with grant funds and proudly wore their project shirts while they sold their goods. The money they raised went to Woodstock's Christmas Clearing House. But that was just the first leg of the project.

In January the students began collecting canned goods for the Woodstock Food Pantry. According to Ms. Mock, "We typically collect between 100 - 150 lbs. But I have to say this year seems like we have set a new record!" The class is scheduled to deliver their food to the food pantry tomorrow as a field trip that is part of the project. Amy told us that typically the months after the holidays are those that are most difficult for the food pantry, and that is why she chose January to collect food to donate.

The final part of the project will take place in the spring. Ms. Mock told us, "In March we will contact the Helping Paws animal shelter and see what items they are in need of. During the month of March we collect as much as we can, reach out to our families and place flyers in the school to reach out to the staff." They then will then take a field trip to the shelter to deliver their donations. "This field trip is a favorite of mine. As the students get to see the animals face to face that are in need of a good homes," she said. "There has been more than one occasion, where a dog gets adopted as a result of a parent volunteer falling in love with it during our field trip," she added.

During the project they have class discussions about what they are doing, why they are doing the project and about how they are helping others. "It is an eye opening experience for five year olds to learn that there are people and animals in their community that they are capable of helping," said Ms. Mock. "It makes the students feel good knowing they are helping others. I would like to think that the concept of 'Giving Back' is something that will follow them the rest of their lives." I think it will.

This Saturday (February 6) is the Foundation "Groundhog Day" fundraising event, I encourage parents and community members to attend our dinner and auction and help us raise even more money for more grants next year. Please visit our website ([www.d200edfoundation.org](http://www.d200edfoundation.org)) for more information on the Foundation and to purchase tickets for the fundraiser. For questions or details about the event, please contact me at [ekthurow@owc.net](mailto:ekthurow@owc.net).