**J. Fred Sparke School and Michael F. Stokes Elementary School Celebrate Unity, Kindness, and Community Engagement**

Submitted By: Brittany Lahti

J. Fred Sparke School and Michael F. Stokes Elementary School have been busy with exciting activities this fall, with both schools engaging in initiatives designed to promote kindness, safety, and community involvement. From Unity Day celebrations to supporting charitable causes, these schools continue to create a positive impact on students, families, and the local community.

**Unity Day: A Day to Stand Against Bullying**

Both Sparke and Stokes schools proudly participated in Unity Day, an event dedicated to preventing bullying and promoting kindness. Students and teachers wore orange to show their commitment to creating inclusive, safe spaces. Throughout the day, students took part in activities that emphasized empathy, acceptance, and respect, strengthening the sense of community within both schools.

**Breast Cancer Awareness: Honoring Colleen Truono**

October also marked Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and staff members at Sparke took part in raising awareness and supporting those affected by breast cancer. Sparke School’s teachers participated in the Jones Beach Walk for a Cure, dedicating their efforts to the memory of Colleen Truono, a beloved colleague who lost her battle to breast cancer last year. Students created cards and posters to support the cause and honor those battling the disease. Sparke staff members are proud to be part of the ongoing fight for a cure.

**Fire Safety: Visits from Levittown Fire Department**

Students at both Sparke and Stokes schools were visited by the Levittown Fire Department, where they learned about fire safety and prevention. The firefighters taught students essential safety tips and how to make good choices in case of an emergency. These informative and fun visits helped students better understand fire safety in both their homes and school environments.

**Halloween Fun: Gingerbread Houses and Storywalks**

Halloween was filled with fun and creativity for students at both Sparke and Stokes. At Sparke, students visited the pumpkin patch in the school’s courtyard to pick their very own pumpkins, while also participating in a *Room on the Broom* Storywalk, where parents joined students outside to read the story as they walked across the field. Meanwhile, third grade students at Stokes participated in a unique Halloween activity—creating their own haunted gingerbread houses. Using delicious icing and candy, students constructed and decorated their spooky creations and had the fun of bringing them home to eat!

**Operation Sweet Tooth: A Sweet Way to Give Back**

At Stokes Elementary, Mrs. Brody’s class collected an impressive 210 pounds of Halloween candy through Operation Sweet Tooth. The candy will be distributed to various organizations, including the USMC base in Garden City, the Coast Guard station at Jones Beach, The Ronald McDonald House in New Hyde Park, and a food bank in Bethpage. In addition, a package of candy will be sent to an Island Trees graduate currently serving in the infantry at a Kentucky military base. This candy drive was a sweet way for students to give back to those who serve our country and support local families in need.

**Make a Change: Fundraising for Hurricane Victims**

Students and staff members at Stokes showed their generosity through a fundraising project called “Make a Change,” which was aimed at supporting victims of the recent hurricane that affected North Carolina. Students and staff raised an impressive $700, which will go toward helping those affected by the disaster. This effort exemplifies the schools' commitment to teaching students the importance of empathy and giving back to those in need.

**Annual Turkey Trot: Running for a Cause**

Sparke School participated in their Annual Turkey Trot fundraiser, where students and teachers dressed as turkeys and ran to raise money for the John Thiessen Foundation. The event raised $304. This event continues to be a highlight of the school year, with students and staff coming together to support a great cause.

**Toy Drive for the John Thiessen Foundation**

In addition to the Turkey Trot, both schools are running Toy Drives to benefit the John Thiessen Foundation, bringing in new toys to help brighten the holidays for children in need. The generosity of the Sparke and Stokes school communities will ensure that many local children receive gifts this holiday season.

**Character Education: Promoting Positive Behavior**

At Sparke School, the Character Education Committee is working hard to promote positive behavior throughout the school. Teachers and administrators collaborate to address behavioral concerns and set clear expectations in the classroom, lunchroom, hallways, bathrooms, and on the bus. As part of the initiative, teachers have created videos that reinforce positive behaviors and emphasize the difference between reporting and tattling. These videos are shown in classrooms throughout the year to help students better understand how to be respectful, responsible, and kind.

**Bulldog Press: A Chance to Become a Published Author**

Students involved in the Bulldog Press Club at Stokes School will have the opportunity to enter the Nassau Reading Council’s Young Author’s Contest. Interested reporters will write personal narratives during the Bulldog Press Club’s morning meetings, sharing their own stories and experiences. Stay tuned to see if one of Stoke’s budding reporters becomes a published author in the Nassau Reading Council’s Young Author’s Contest Booklet!

**AI Brings Lady Liberty to Life**

Through the magic of AI, Mrs. Mitchell’s Third Grade students at Stokes School experienced a unique learning opportunity when they "listened" to the Statue of Liberty tell her own story. The statue shared details about her journey across the sea from France, her significance to the United States, and how her copper exterior changed to the green patina she has today. Lady Liberty also mentioned how she sometimes gets cold in the New York Harbor but loves when students and their families come to visit her on Liberty Island. The students will also hear from other landmarks as part of their social studies unit about America.

**Living Wax Museum at Stokes**

Third Grade students at Stokes are kicking off a nonfiction reading unit focused on biographies of influential people from the past and present. At the end of the unit, students will participate in a Living Wax Museum for their families and loved ones, where they will bring historical figures to life and share their stories. This event will be a fun, interactive way for students to showcase their learning and connect with their families.

**Looking Ahead: School Spirit Days and More**

As the year progresses, both Sparke and Stokes are planning many more School Spirit Days to engage students and celebrate upcoming holidays and events. These activities will continue to promote school pride, excitement, and a strong sense of community throughout the rest of the school year.

**A Shared Commitment to Community**

Both J. Fred Sparke School and Stokes Elementary remain deeply committed to fostering kindness, generosity, and a sense of responsibility among their students. Through collaborative efforts, fundraising initiatives, and educational activities, both schools are helping students develop into caring, thoughtful, and community-oriented individuals.