



Tales of the Tiles



The History of the Maine Memorial Elementary School Ceiling Tile Project



2010 - 2024



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Tales of the Tiles: The History of the Maine Memorial Ceiling Tile Project

If a picture is worth a thousand words then 60 decorated ceiling tiles created over a 14 year span of time at Maine Memorial Elementary have a lot to say. Reflected in each are the joys, celebrations, sorrows, retirements, acknowledgements, or educational trends of their time period. They represent the ideas and artistic skills of countless dedicated 5th graders who had a passion for art and a school community that enthusiastically anticipated the yearly reveal of the latest creations.

These artists who passed through Maine Memorial so many years ago are now grown and are among our hard-working citizens in positions such as teachers, nurses, writers, coaches, retail workers, to name a few, while others are continuing their education in middle school, high school and college. For each of these individuals, the ceiling tile they helped create in collaboration serves as a “snapshot in time” on their educational journey as well as a reflection of the happenings in our school community.

How was the project started?

Born out of the Maine-Endwell Central School District's initiative to become a District of Leadership, we all embraced the concepts of Sean Covey's ***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens***, and ***The Seven Habits of Happy Kids***. The Maine Memorial art program supported the initiative in part by creating 7 tiles to highlight the 7 habits. Students in the 5th grade who showed exceptional interest in art, worked after school for several weeks to create the tiles. In addition, these students actually USED the 7 habits (*Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood, Put First Things First, Synergize, and Sharpen the Saw*) to effectively work together to plan and implement their ideas.

Eventually the name Maine Memorial Art Club was changed to Maine Memorial Art Leadership Club, since the emphasis was on volunteering to give up recess time to create art to serve others.

How were the tiles made?

Fifth grade art student volunteers brainstormed ideas and began to work on individual sketches. Next the sketches were shared and students chose their favorites to narrow it down to one final sketch. Color choices and materials were chosen, and the design was penciled in on the tile. Over a period of days and sometimes several weeks, students painted with acrylics and highlighted with markers, paint markers, and sometimes glitter and photos. The tiles were then revealed to the student body and staff at Morning Program or Flag Day Celebrations and hung in the ceiling in various hallways.



Where did the topics for the tiles originate?

Once The Seven Habits tiles were completed, suggestions were taken for future designs. Character Education was in full swing and it was decided that highlighting Character Ed words of the month (such as Respect and Responsibility), which were featured at our School's Morning Program, would serve as topics for tiles.

Eventually, tiles were created as a show of thanks to special individuals who played an important role in our schools. Tiles were expanded to honor staff members as they retired, and commemorate events to celebrate triumphs. As times of sorrow and tragedy touched our school, tiles were made to honor those individuals and events as well.

We hope you enjoy learning about each one of these as you take a “tour” of the tiles!

*Mary Ann Wasilnak, Retired Art Teacher
Maine Memorial Elementary School*

Where are the tiles today?

When construction began on the Maine Memorial Elementary School last year, Principal Bill Dundon approached teacher Jim Tokos to let him know that the painted ceiling tiles were being removed to allow for the new air conditioning system to be installed. Rather than discard them, Jim, a member of the Nanticoke Valley Historical Society suggested that the historical society might want them to preserve their history. The historical society was pleased to accept them.

Thanks to a grant from the Broome County Arts Council, they are currently boxed in storage and separated with acid-free tissue paper to prevent damage. In addition to compiling this book, NVHS exhibited a selection of the tiles at the annual Maineifest event and looks forward to exhibiting additional tiles in the future.

Acknowledgment and Thanks

- Mary Ann Wasilnak - Retired Art Teacher and pioneer of the Tiles Project
- Kellie Smith - Art Teacher who continued the Tiles Project
- Bill Dundon (Retired Principal MMES), and Jim Tokos (Retired Teacher MMES) for the vision to preserve the tiles.
- Beverly Battaglini - Photography for MEMS and community
- Broome County Arts Council
- Philip Childs - Photography and the concept to preserve the story and create the book.
- Nanticoke Valley Historical Society of Maine, NY and the Members and Trustees who supported this project.
- Gordie Gottlieb - President NVHS and book composition and layout
- Joanne Weir - Curator of Janet Bowers Museum NVHS and Editor

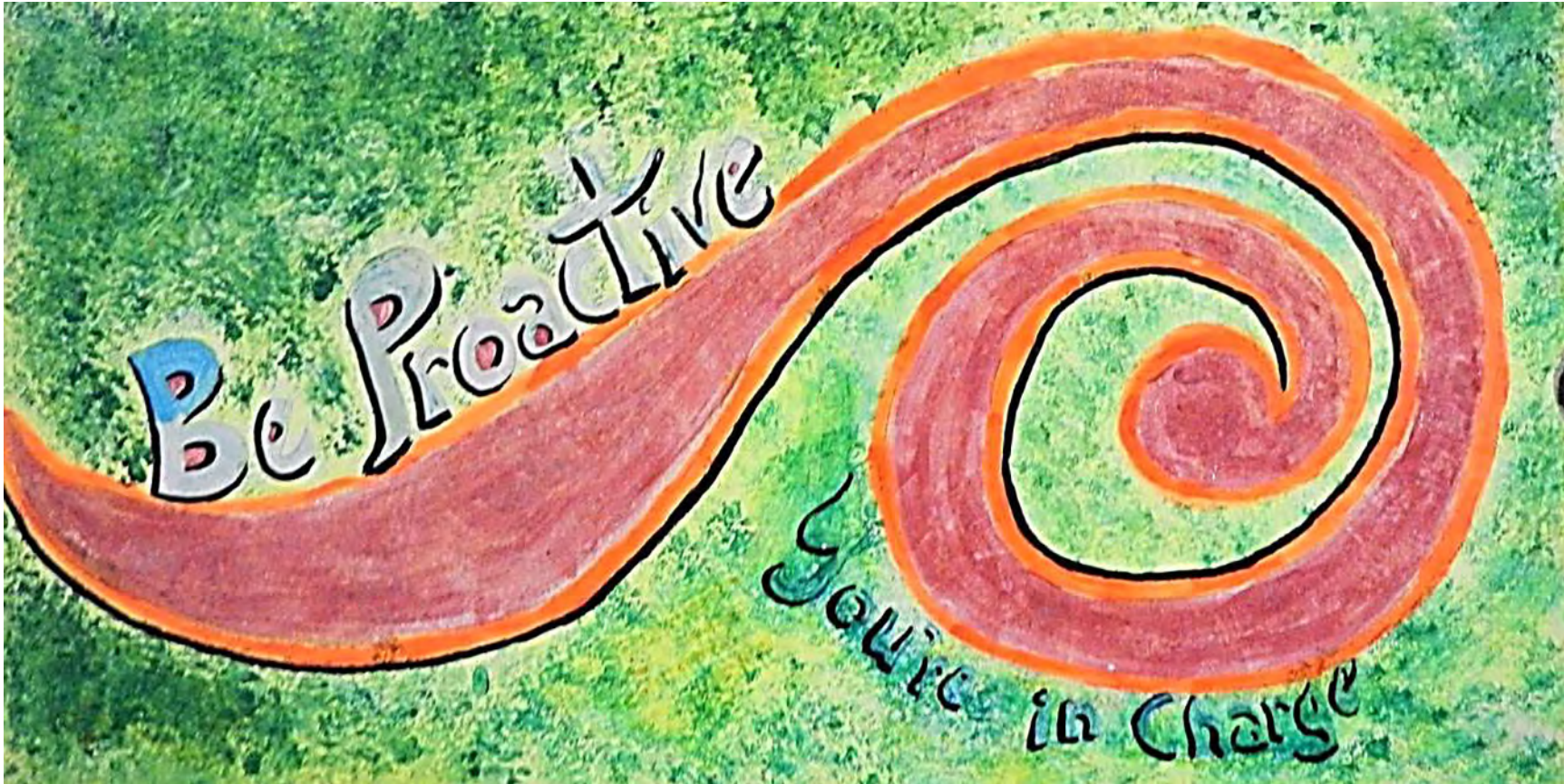


We realized, as we began laying out this book, that we had walked beneath these tiles hundreds of times without truly giving them the attention they deserved. Did we really stop to think what the **Tiles** meant to the students and teachers who created them? As members of a historical society, our work is to preserve artifacts, safeguard buildings, and tell the stories of the past. The **Tales of the Tiles** is a perfect example of the meaningful details we often overlook in the rush of daily life. We pass old buildings, road markers, stone walls, and cemeteries every day - each with it's own story waiting to be told.

The teachers and students who created these tiles learned lessons, explored admirable character traits, and showed respect for their school community. In the process, they gained valuable insight and captured one of the many ways a community evolves. We want to keep the life lessons that administrators and teachers found important both alive and visible.

We would like to thank Mary Ann Wasilnak and Kellie Smith for sharing the story behind these tiles. We also hope to gather more input as we post each tile on our Facebook page, inviting former students and community members to share what these creations meant to them.

Maine Memorial Elementary School is a special place - one that brings the community together and helps shape the people of the Nanticoke Valley. We hope you enjoy this book and the presentations that accompany it. We also extend our thanks to the Broome County Arts Council for their support through a grant that made the preservation of the tiles possible.



The Seven Habits ceiling tiles were the first ever created at Maine Memorial. This is Habit 1 of The Seven Habits of Happy Kids. The Seven Habits philosophy was embraced by the entire district during this time period. It reminds students they are responsible for their own attitudes, actions, and moods, and encourage them do the right thing even when no one is looking.



This clever design depicts a brain jumping hurdles and being lugged into a finish line to emphasize the importance of Habit 2, “Begin with the End in Mind”. It emphasized the importance of planning ahead, which was integral to the ceiling tile artists’ efforts!



In 2010, this tile is one of the first created at Maine Memorial. It is part of a series of 7 tiles. Sean Covey's books *The Seven Habits of Happy Kids* and *The Seven Habits of Happy Teens* were a district-wide focus and we became known as "A District of Leadership" under the guidance of Superintendent Joe Stoner. The habits were taught to help children develop a strong foundation of personal responsibility, interpersonal skills, and self-renewal, empowering them to be more effective and well-rounded students. Maine Memorial teachers and staff embraced the seven habits and integrated them in daily school life and lessons. The Art Leadership Club at Maine Memorial was thus born to support the district initiative. Fifth grade students with a high interest in art began to use their time and talent to create various art projects to benefit the school community and beyond. This first series of tiles hung in the main hallway outside of the office to remind the students to use the 7 habits in daily life.



This tile was based on Habit number 4, Entitled Win-Win, this tile used the color mixing concept of blending two colors to get a new color. This habit encourages students to cheer others on to be successful and to avoid putting others down.



Habit 5 is Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood and this tile highlights the importance of seeking to understand the perspectives of others. The design features an abstract ear with sound waves to depict good listening skills.



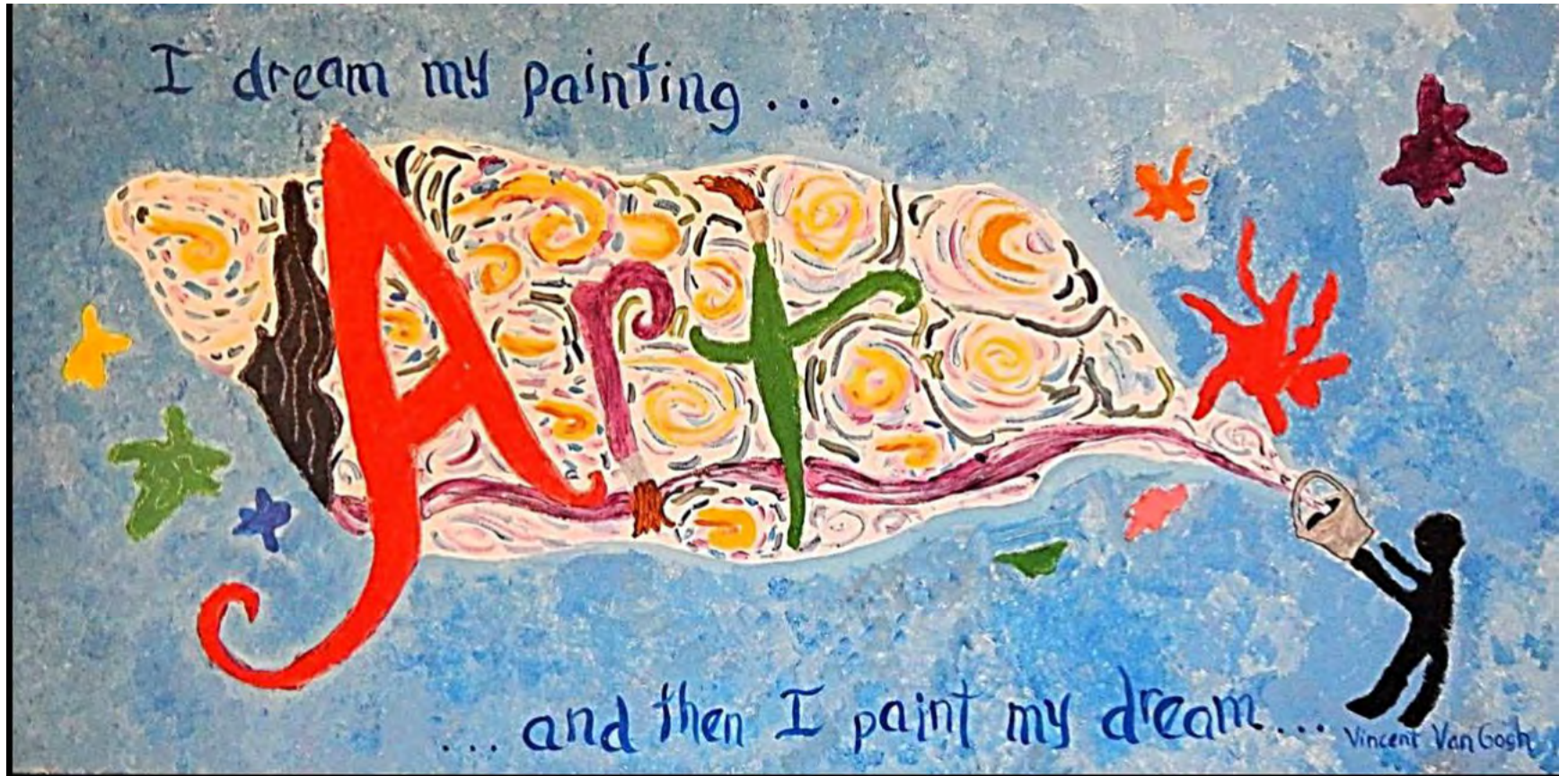
This tile represents habit 6: Synergize. It was designed to emphasize the importance of working collaboratively with others. This skill was especially important to the ceiling tile artists as they had to brainstorm ideas, sketch, paint, and detail tiles as a team.



This vintage tile from the year 2010 was Habit 7 and part of the first series of tiles. But what does “Sharpen the Saw” mean? Just ask anyone who was part of the Maine-Endwell School years then and they will tell you! It means having a balanced approach to life by taking a break from work/school to rejuvenate your body, mind and spirit. The artists chose to represent the image of the world in warm vs. cool colors to illustrate the importance of keeping balance in your life.



Who doesn't love the story of The Rainbow Fish? The beloved children's book highlights the importance of sharing., and this tile was hung in the kindergarten hallway to emphasize this concept.



Many ceiling tiles were designed to highlight special interest areas of the school including Art, Music, and Physical Education. This tile was hung near the art room and was inspired by Vincent Van Gogh's Starry Night painting.



Let's face it, the world would be pretty boring without art. This tile which hung in the art room hallway features all traced hands of each artist decorated in their own style. The quote came from a hand-made art apron worn by art teacher Mrs. Wasilnak. The apron was a gift from former Maine Memorial student Aria who did her student teaching in art at Maine Memorial!



This ceiling tile was one that not only decorated the hallway near the Custodial Office but was intended to thank and honor the custodial staff for all they do to keep the building clean and tidy.



The hallway near the music room was visited several times weekly by each student in the building. This vintage tile was designed to brighten the space and highlight the efforts of our wonderful music department.



Physical Education classes and athletics were a highlight for students. This tile placed near the gym encouraged good sportsmanship. The Maine Memorial gym was used by youth, middle school and high school students for practices and games so this message inspired many beyond the Maine Memorial school community.



Maine Memorial was blessed with many wonderful community and parent volunteers over the years. This tile was dedicated to all of them especially Kim Hayden, who devoted her time and talent to various projects, not only at Maine Memorial, but throughout the district.



This tile was created and added to the space just inside the Maine Memorial Entrance. It welcomed students, staff, and visitors to our building! Primary colors were chosen to enhance the “elementary school” feel. Sometimes artists signed their names to the back of the tile. Artists who signed the back of this tile were Maddie, Sara, Madison, Nova, Mary, Helena, Jenna, Julianne, and Rylee.



This colorful tile uses warm over cool colors and a variety of pattern to highlight the important role of our school nurse and the retirement of beloved Nurse Sandy Nemcek. Retirement tiles were always bitter sweet as we were sad to say good-bye, but rejoiced in a job well done and an exciting new chapter in life to begin.



The inspiration for this tile came from the Morning Program theme song for the year, Walk a Mile in My Shoes and highlighted the Character Ed word EMPATHY.



Everyone who knew primary teacher “Mrs. Burke” was aware of her love of cats! This tile was created to recognize her retirement and to remind students to walk quietly in the hallway. This one brightened the ceiling near the auditorium and kindergarten hallways.



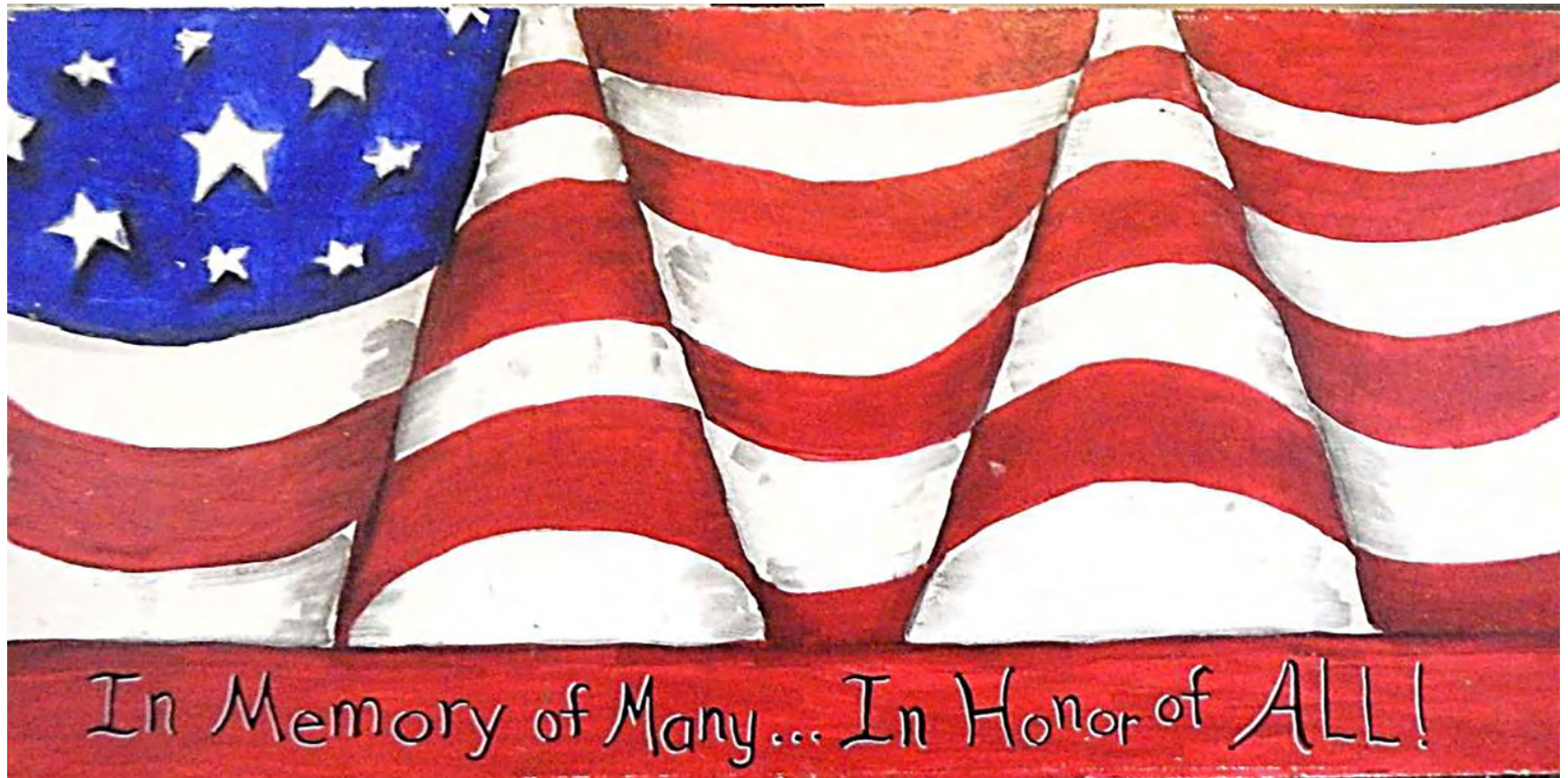
Two teacher's aids and general all around loving helpers in the school were retiring the year this panel was painted in their honor. To do the job that they did everyday is a beautiful thing, especially as it comes with little acknowledgement of how hard it can be. However, these ladies powered through with their love and kindness as examples for the children. The girls that painted this piece worked very hard during their 20 minute recess breaks in a special corner of the art room.



This tile from 2014 was inspired by a line from the Maine Memorial School Pledge which was recited daily. Students at this young age were able to see the need to encourage their peers to respect, welcome, and appreciate uniqueness in others. The words “shapes and colors” are written in the center and are important elements of art, but they also represent how people come in many shapes and colors as well! The artists who created this tile signed the back of it...Savannah, Nicolette, Jenna, Julianne, and Rylee.



This tile served as a companion to "The Rainbow Fish" tile using similar colors and theme. It recognized the importance of accepting and celebrating individual differences.



Flag Day was celebrated at Maine Memorial with a large outdoor Morning Program assembly. Students were dressed in patriotic colors and several classes performed marches, songs, poems and the famous Maine Memorial flag weaving. This tradition honored our country, our veterans, and our flag. Students used art concepts from a recent OP ART lesson to design this flag tile. It was presented at the Flag Day Morning Program.



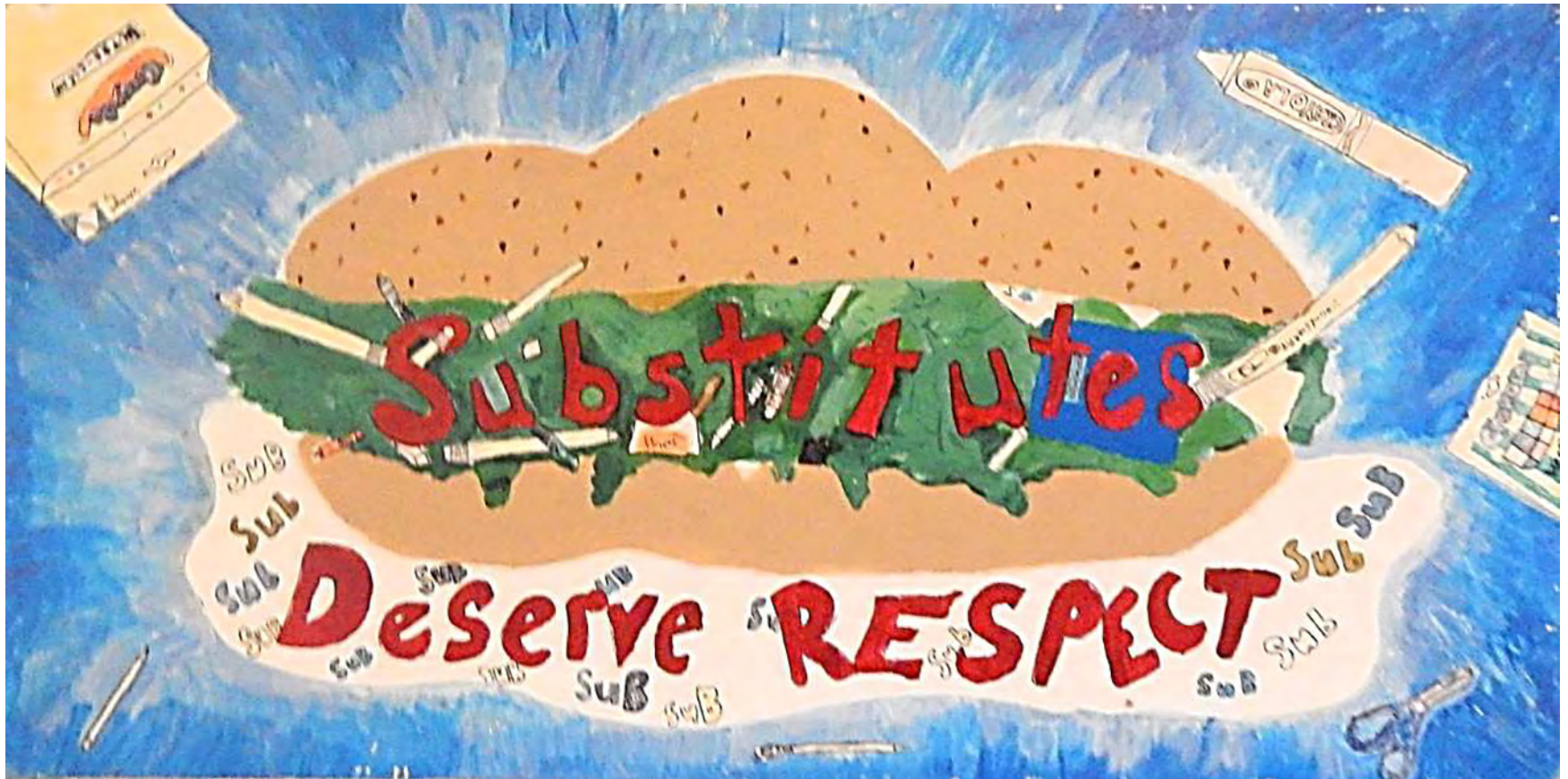
This ceiling tile was created to honor the hard work and service of our dedicated school board members. The artists chose Maine-Endwell blue and gold colors and a younger and older student in silhouette, showing the growth over the years in school. It hung outside the auditorium doors where school board meetings were held.



This tile was created to emphasize the importance of reading and features a scene from a book by beloved author Dr. Seuss. Artists used an impressionistic style sponge technique to create the background sky. This tile was dedicated to Mrs. Mariani and Mrs. Tull who retired in 2016.



This tile commemorates some dark days in the Maine-Endwell School District. In the 2012-2013 school year, many district employee positions were eliminated due to budget cuts. Additionally, many teachers and staff members were forced to leave their schools to transfer to other buildings to fill in gaps made by the cuts. This tile was created to honor the many individuals who left Maine Memorial that year due to retirement, lay-off, or relocation. They truly left their handprint on our hearts!



This was a special tile since a few of the students had noticed a problem with how poorly substitute teachers were being treated by students. Needless to say, they were not receiving the respect and cooperation they deserved. The students decided to create a tile to draw attention to this issue and cleverly used the idea of a “sub” sandwich filled with school supplies to illustrate their message. Students presented this tile at an all-school morning program which began a conversation about the need to respect all teachers, substitutes included!



Nutrition plays an important role in education. This tile reminded students of this and encouraged them to make healthy choices. It was hung near the cafeteria area and dedicated to our kitchen staff.



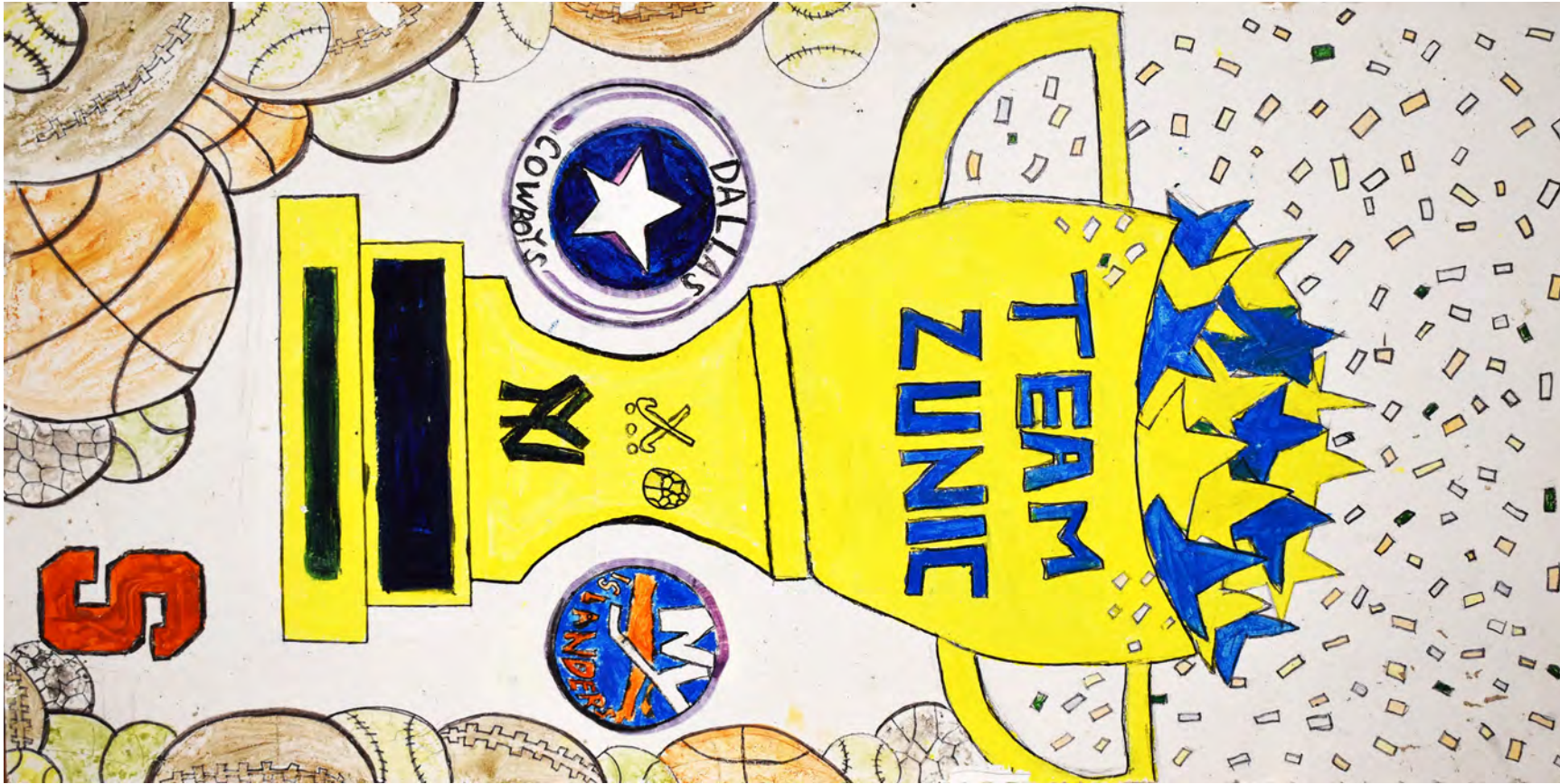
This crooked little schoolhouse scene so delicately sponge painted was created to decorate the the space right outside the principal's office. It was done and presented to our school principal, Mrs. Nikki Berkowitz.



As the language of leadership began to fade, students were encouraged to live “the Spartan Way”, which was a Character Ed philosophy based on the ideals written in our school pledge. This pledge was recited daily, either at Morning Program or over the loud speaker at the start of the day.



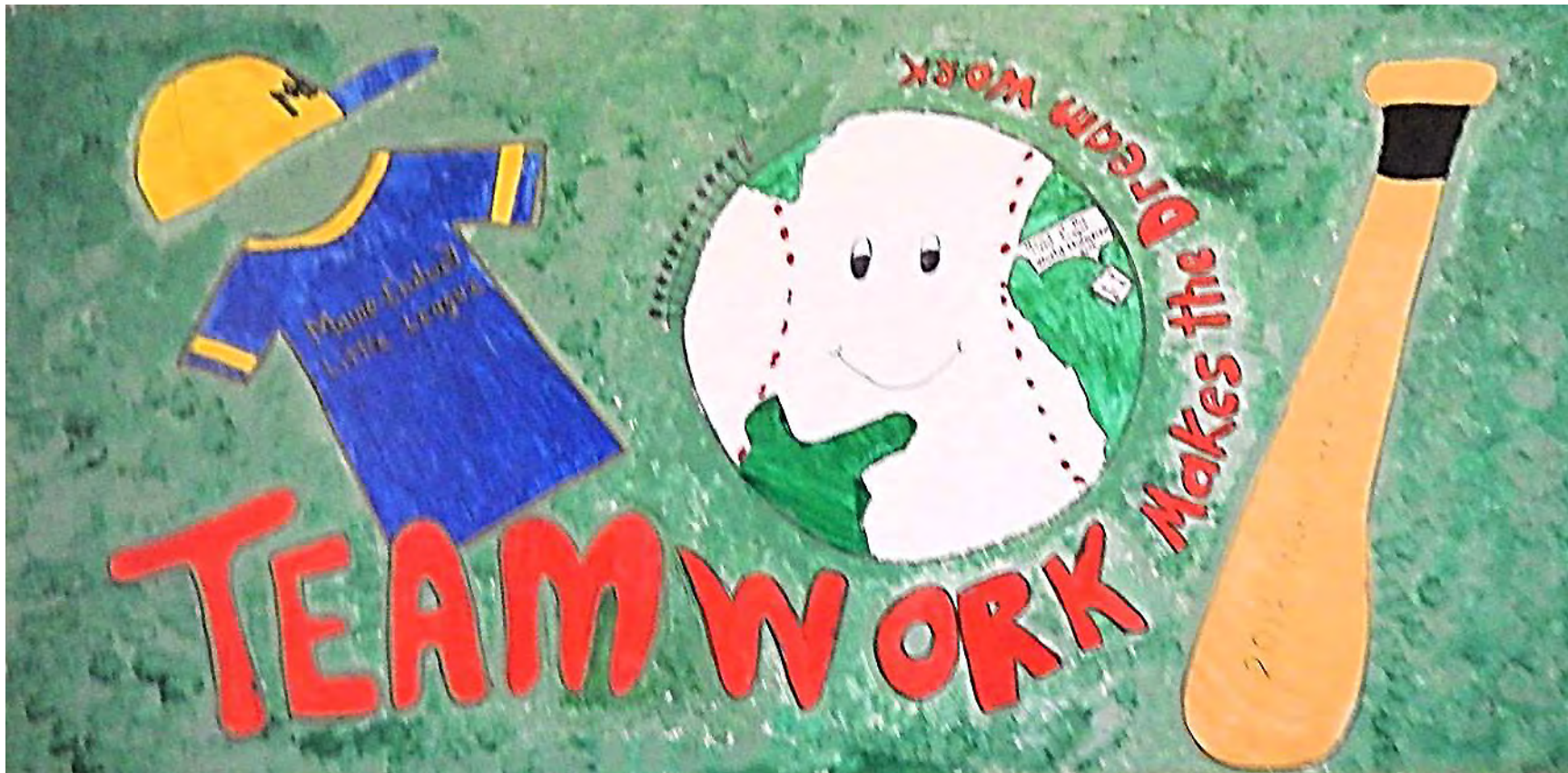
This tile belonged to a set of tiles based on Morning Program Character Education words which were highlighted each month. The tile depicts a caterpillar waiting patiently to emerge as a beautiful butterfly.



Maine Memorial's long time physical education teacher sadly passed and our students really wanted to dive into this work of art in memory of him. The student artists knew that family was the main team for Mr. Zunic and he carried that into his teaching. His students also knew his favorite teams and incorporated these into this piece of art. This included field hockey for his daughters and soccer for his son.



Yet another important Character Education word was depicted in an “old-fashioned” manner with a gentleman tipping his head toward a lady in a show of respect. Several of these earlier tiles were placed in the area just outside the gym and cafeteria to brighten the space. As tiles were completed, they were revealed to the students and staff at an all- school Morning Program. Artists would take turns explaining the process, inspiration and message of the tile to the audience.



Some ceiling tiles were designed during times of joy and celebration. Maine-Endwell Little League has produced many championship teams over the years but in 2016 the team stunned the community by winning the World Series Championship in Williamsport, PA! This event put our small community on the world stage and such an accomplishment deserved to be honored with a Maine Memorial ceiling tile! What better way to highlight the Character Ed word "TEAMWORK!" This ceiling tile represents the importance of working together to achieve a common goal.



This tile was placed right outside the cafeteria and drew attention to our district M-EALS program which collects food for community families in need. The characters depicting from various cultures were skillfully created and hand drawn by fifth grade artist Lucas. He went on to graduate from Maine-Endwell High School in 2018 and has become an illustrator/author, local historian and educator!



This simple but clever ceiling tile done in complementary colors took its inspiration from one of our most famous presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Students had been working on tints and shades in art class and incorporated the color scheme into the design.



This colorful tile reflects an exercise in responsibility by depicting a student having to choose to either do homework or play video games. A great deal of time went into coloring the various small shapes in this piece.



As Maine-Endwell became a District of Leadership, students were asked to find a way to become leaders even if only in the simplest ways. They could lead by walking quietly in the hallway, helping a fellow student, respecting their teacher, or by caring for their library books and musical instruments. Students traced their own hands to create the border to this sweet and simple tile.



This tile from 2012 with its soft pastel colors and silver pattern, appear warm and happy at first glance. However it marked one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Maine Memorial. Three of our young students, Josh, Tyler, and former student Taylor lost their lives in car accidents. Our school and community were devastated. The theme was chosen since, even though the students are no longer with us, the love we feel for them lives on. The small silver patterns on the ribbon are actually the initials of the boys, while the silver designs in the center of the ribbon are horseshoes, representing Taylor and her well known love of horses. Artists who signed the back of this tile include Kiera, Samantha, Marielle, Danielle, Maria, Molly, Sadie, Maeve, Gracie, Mikenzie, and Lauren.



Everyone at Maine Memorial Elementary School knew that our reading teacher, Mrs. Knaul, was a Buffalo Bills fanatic. The student artists that design this piece of art were focused on the mascot for the Buffalo Bills juggling books because reading is awesome (and so too must be the Buffalo Bills).



Promoting an attitude of gratitude was the concept behind this work. Artists used perspective and overlapping techniques to create a 3-D effect. This is one of the earlier tiles based on the Character Ed words of that year.



Friendship brightens our world and this sweet tile highlights that fact. Some of the artists wanted to add their sports jersey number to the shirts of the figures as a way of adding their “signature” to the piece!



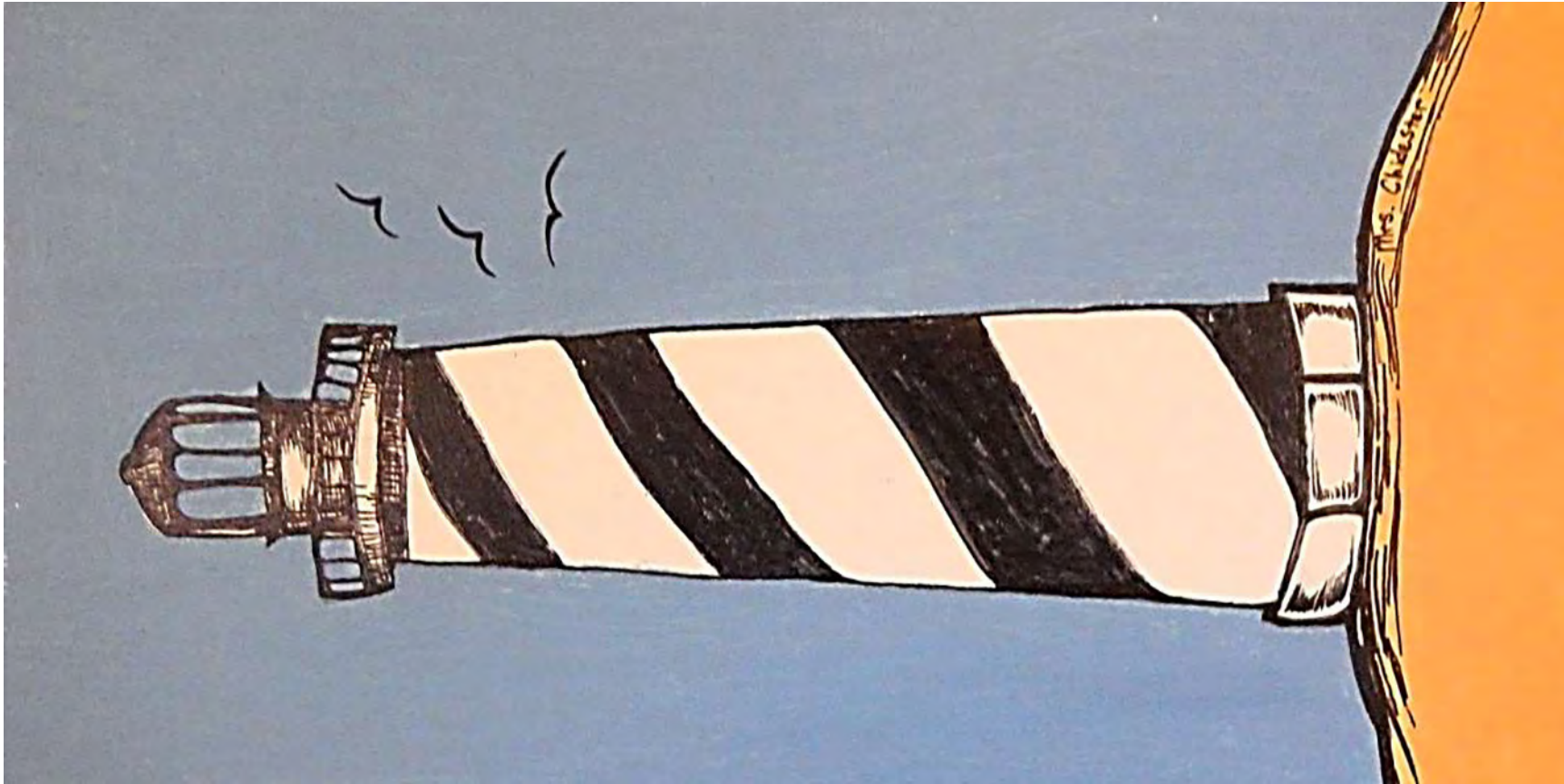
This tile from 2014 was inspired by a line from the Maine Memorial School Pledge which was recited daily. Students at this young age were able to see the need to encourage their peers to respect, welcome, and appreciate uniqueness in others. The words “shapes and colors” are written in the center and are important elements of art, but they also represent how people come in many shapes and colors as well! The artists who created this tile signed the back of it...Savannah, Nicolette, Jenna, Julianne, and Rylee.



This tile was made just for the fun of it using a variety of simple printmaking techniques!



Mrs. Maione loved teaching children the joy of books. She used these four character books regularly to assist in learning how to read. The student artists worked hard capturing these characters from the books that Mrs. Maione used everyday. They were so proud to present this piece of art to her at her retirement event.



Mrs. Chidester, a beloved teacher was leaving the school and the student artists wished to make a special panel with her favorite thing, a lighthouse. She actually has this image tattooed on her wrist, which the students drew this image from.



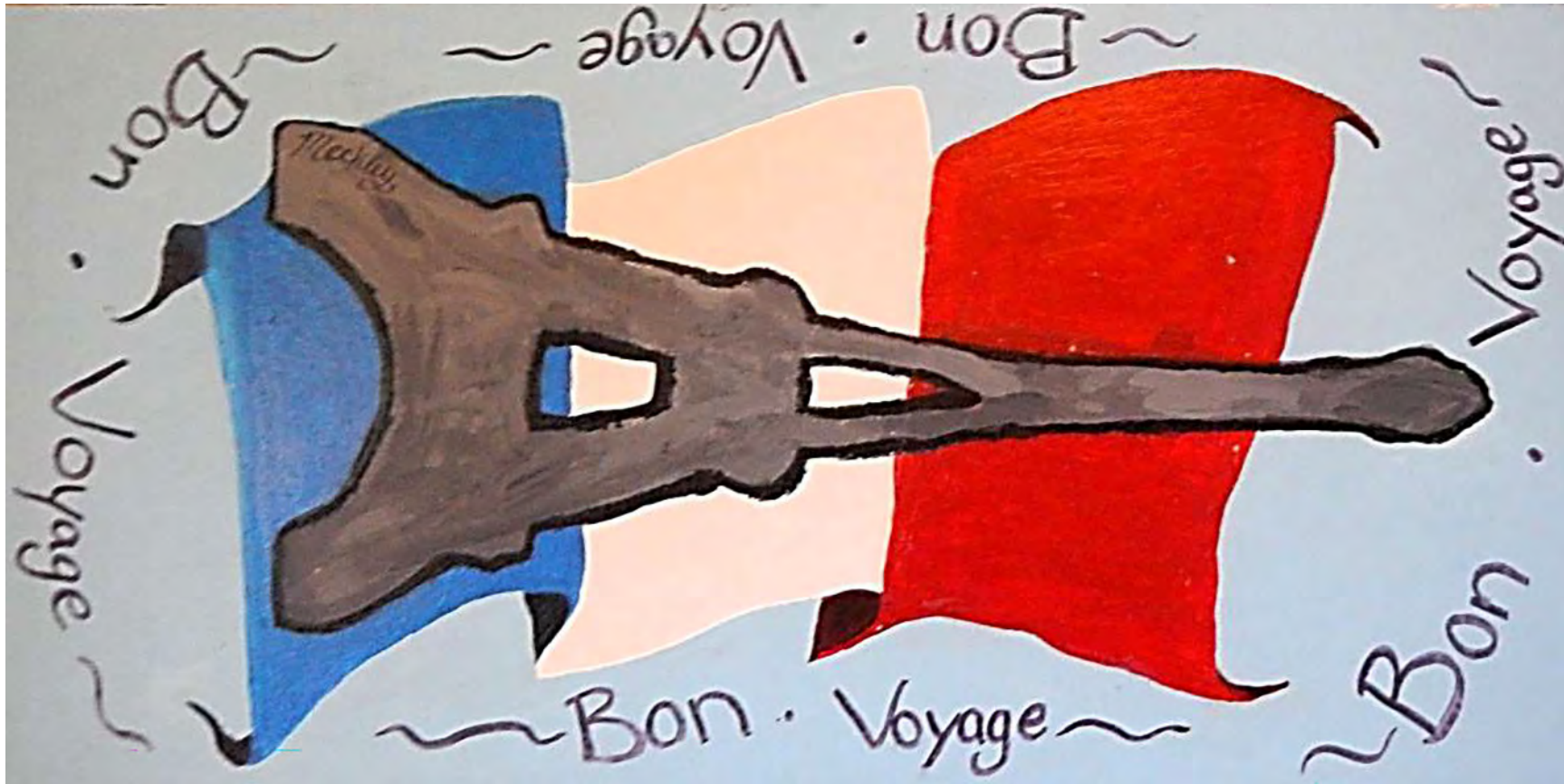
Student artists wished to make a happy painting for a very nice lady in their school who was retiring. The students painted pretty daisies with positive messages to reflect Mrs. Lambiase's personality.



All of the students at Maine Memorial knew that Mrs. Gould loved pink, glitter, music, theatrics and sharing that love with children. The student artists working on this collaborative piece were very concerned about getting that message across in their work of art!



This dramatic ceiling tile features a silhouette sunset promoting the importance and fun of reading. Read Month was popular with students and included tracking their reading time in logs, having guest readers in classrooms, “Stop, Drop, and Read,” and of course the annual “Read Performance” show put on by faculty, staff, and parents.



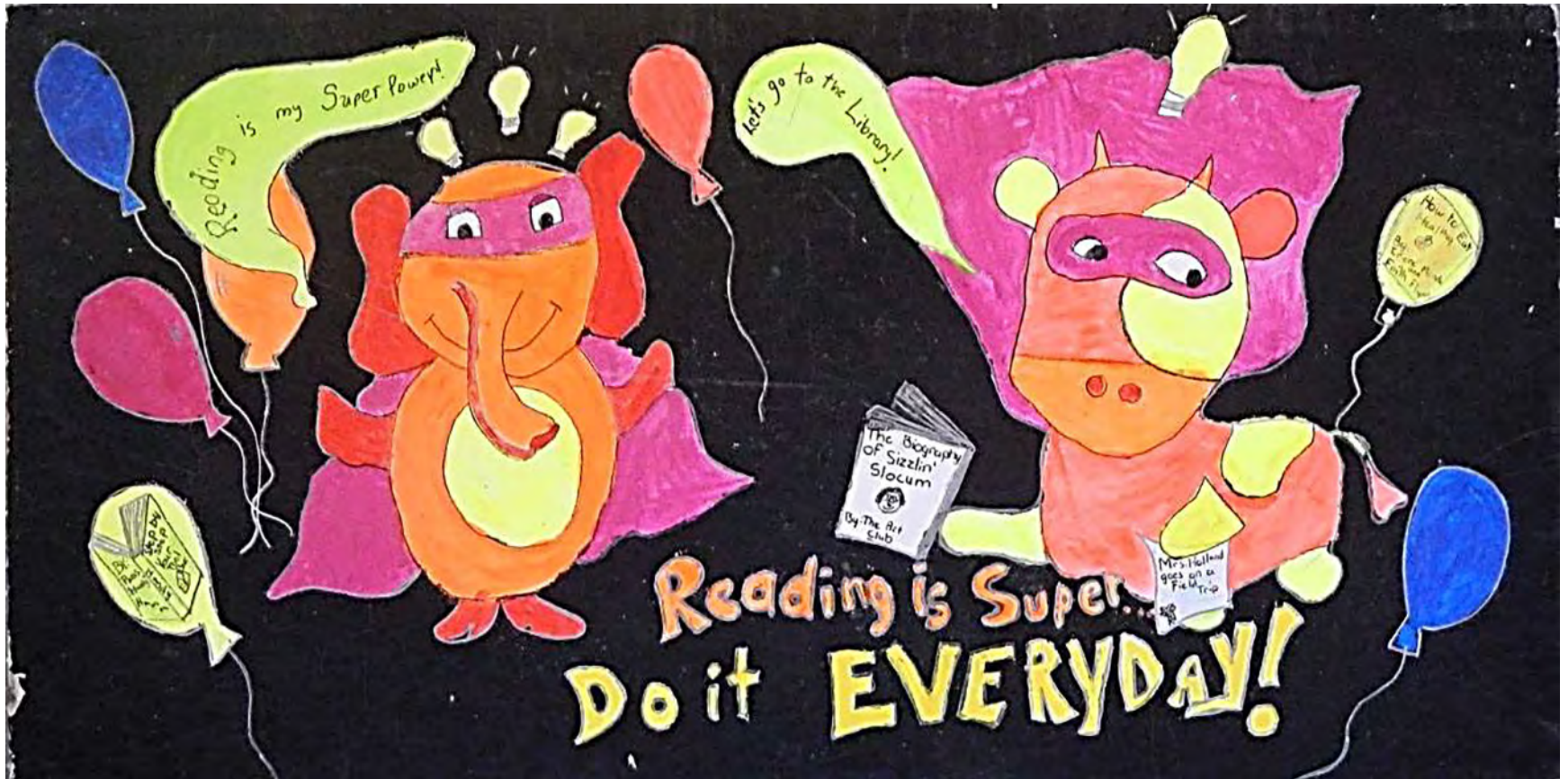
Mrs. Meckley had the most wonderful French accent and upon retirement was traveling through France to visit with family. Maine Memorial was blessed by her charisma and style while she worked with students. These artists wished to create a beautiful rendition of the Eiffel Tower with the French flag behind it to wish Mrs. Meckley a bon voyage in retirement.



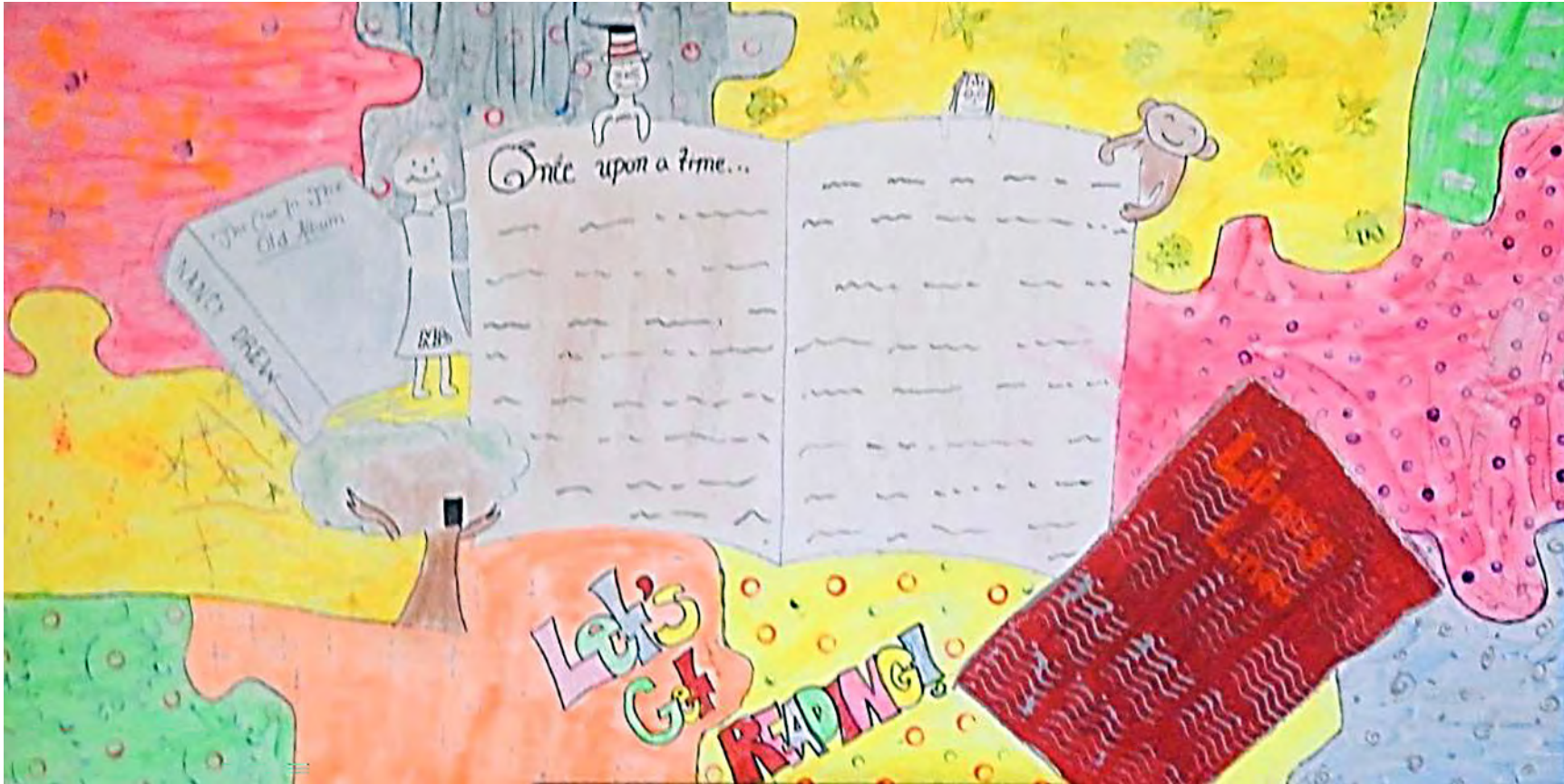
This sweet and colorful design emphasizes the way each of us can impact another with something as simple as a smile or kind word.



Reading was constantly promoted at Maine Memorial. This famous book by Dr. Seuss was used to highlight the importance of books as well as pay tribute to primary teachers Lynne Calvey, Lisa Kotula, and Mary Jane Cotter on their retirement.



This tile was dedicated to staff members Mrs Slocum, Mrs. Holland, Mrs. Monte, Mrs. Hill, and Mr. Hamm upon their retirement. Reading was the big push of the time and the tile features a few small books highlighting each of these individuals in the title of the books!



The Maine Memorial Library was at the center of our building activities. Long time librarian Mrs. LaDue was honored with this tile upon her retirement. Taking a close look at the red book on the lower right, you can see it was written for her, our own “Library Linda!” Of course this tile found a spot right outside of the library.



Over the years we have had several animal friends in our classrooms at Maine Memorial, these are a few of them. Two fifth grade boys became experts at drawing bearded dragons and really wanted to make this tile specifically for our beloved teacher, Mr. Tokos. The boys worked hard on several drawings prior to putting Maine Memorial's sweet-tempered bearded dragon, Dingo, in a panel. The young artists added Dingo's rabbit and turtle friends on a bright sunny day to complete their composition.



This tile from 2018 was perhaps the most difficult to create because it had to be hidden from the art teacher, Mrs. Wasilnak! Since it was her retirement tile, parent volunteers, and photographer Bev Battaglini worked secretly with students and staff to create the work which featured photographs relating to the art program. Truly a work of “heART!”



In 2015 Thomas Tull generously donated to the athletic, art, and technology programs at Maine-Endwell. Images referencing the turf baseball field, art and technology, and the movies Mr. Tull made, highlighted the tile. Artists also included a reference to his football jersey when he played for the Spartans. Mr. and Mrs. Tull even made a visit to Maine Memorial to check out the tile for themselves showing great examples of both generosity and gratitude!



This tile was created as a tribute to honor the memory of Maine-Endwell School Board President Al Ewing, father of Maine Memorial teacher Andy Ewing, following his sudden passing in the 2015 school year. Mr. Ewing had served on the Board of Education for 16 years. Now that is a great example of commitment! Mr. Ewing was passionate about education, art, music, athletics, and of course his family. Students brainstormed a way to creatively illustrate his many interests by creating this scene.



In 2022, two artistic, kind, nurturing and garden-loving teachers aids, Mrs. Bush and Mrs. Rinkewich, retired. A group of fifth grade artists wanted to depict a bountiful garden for them. The goal was to have as many students as possible, in all grade levels at Maine Memorial, draw flowers for the retirees. The artists in charge of this ceiling panel collaged the flowers onto a beautiful and happy green garden.