

## Ethel A. Jacobsen Students, Staff Rally To 'Squash' Hunger

Ethel A. Jacobsen Elementary School Principal Frank Birney began last Friday's "Squashing Hunger" event with four questions for the students.

"Who loves our local library? Who loves our garden? Who loves (the book) *Sophie's Squash*? Who loves squash?"

Gathered in the school gym, the youngsters responded with the enthusiasm that only kids at the tail end of a school week possess.

The E.J. students are no strangers to vegetable-themed festivities. Their garden is an educational focal point at the Surf City school, and its bounty is often celebrated with a fun and tasty occasion. The garden also connects the district to the local community. This fall, for example, 15 pounds of squash were harvested to donate to the St. Francis Community Center Food Pantry in Brant Beach.

Additionally, the students and staff brought in 206 non-perishable items to give to the food bank.

Before the real fun began on Friday, the kids welcomed Superintendent Peter Kopack; Board of Education Vice President Colette Southwick and board member William Fenimore; Surf City Mayor Francis R. Hodgson and Councilman William Hodgson; Ship Bottom Councilman Joseph Valyo; and Ship Bottom Chief Financial Officer Kathy Flanagan.

Also in attendance were Amy Bodine and Elizabeth Silk-Gutowski to accept the donations for St. Francis; Kristen Crepezzi, children's librarian for the Long Beach Island Branch of the Ocean County Library; and Don Brown, owner of Greenhouse Café, and his daughter,

Sarah Brown, who were in the school kitchen cooking up squash.

Via Skype, Crepezzi introduced Pat Zietlow Miller, author of *Sophie's Squash*. Miller then read her book, which tells of a girl who refuses to let her mom cook a squash they purchased at a farmer's market. Instead, Sophie names it Bernice and takes it with her everywhere.

Miller explained to the kids that the idea for the book came from an experience she had with her own daughter.

Each class in the school had appointed a "garden ambassador" to ask Miller questions:

"How long did it take to write *Sophie's Squash*? (Four years, said Miller; it was her first book.)

"What are you writing now?" (A sequel to her book *Be Kind*, tentatively titled "Be Strong.")

"What is your favorite vegetable?" (Broccoli, said the author.)

After the audience bid goodbye to Miller, Don and Sarah Brown readied the students for a sweet-versus-savory squash taste test. They also explained the many health benefits of squash, which is rich in Vitamin A, and a good source of fiber, potassium and other nutrients.

The youngsters were all given samples of the squash dishes, and then physical education teacher James Lamarco asked the kids to vote for their favorite by yelling and clapping for the one they liked best, which, of course, seemed to result in a tie.

Then he encouraged, "If you love squash, make some noise!"

And they did.

As the event wound down, Long Beach Island Education Association President Patti Gerety pointed out



Photographs by Ryan Morrill

**GARDEN GOODS:** (Clockwise from top) E.J. students cheer at 'Squashing Hunger.' LBIEA President Patti Gerety (right) presents a check to Elizabeth Silk-Gutowski from St. Francis. Gym teacher James Lamarco serves up squash.

that this year, the LBIEA and school family - who can donate \$50 a year to wear jeans on Fridays for "Jeans for a Cause" - raised \$805 for St. Francis. A total of \$1,570 was split between

the St. Francis Center, the Red Cross and Family Promise, an Ocean County organization that arranges temporary lodging in area churches for homeless families.

To learn more about the St. Francis Food Pantry, visit [stfranciscenterbi.org/family-support/food-pantry](http://stfranciscenterbi.org/family-support/food-pantry).

— Juliet Kaszas-Hoch