

Say hello to better manners

Students at Georges Vanier Elementary use language to connect with each other

by Kelly McManus

Bonjour! Kumusta! Hello! Sat sri akal! Senga yai! The little voices call out in unison, five third-graders standing in the hall at Georges Vanier Elementary, practising their manners. "It's important to have good manners," explains little Taranjot Dhoot. "It feels good in your heart and it makes you feel special to be nice to people." "And to try to understand them," says Rahul Reddy. "Watch!"

In sign language, he deftly expresses please, thank you, you're welcome, excuse me and I'm sorry.

The other children join in with ease. The lesson breaks up momentarily as a procession of wide-eyed Kindergarten passes by. "That's my brother!" shouts one third-grader, giving hugs to one and then all of the younger kids.

"It's not always easy to have manners with your brothers," whispers Taranjot. "And I have a whole bunch of them."

This week, the kids at Georges Vanier met with Judi the Manners Lady, a travelling speaker who uses songs, costumes and props to teach kids about the importance of sharing, patience, kindness and diversity. One of the resulting school projects is a year-long challenge for students to learn to say hello in the 30 languages spoken by students and families attending the school.

"These are pretty basic skills we want the kids to pick up, but they're things we often take for granted," says Burt Deeter, school principal.

"Video games, TV, those don't emphasize this stuff. Kids aren't picking up on some of those social cues they need to learn."

Deeter cited the decreasing amount of "adult contact time" in kids' lives as one reason for diminishing manners, respect, kindness and patience on the playground over the last 20 years.

Janet Lutton, a school counsellor, cited increasing anxiety and urban tensions as another reason for dete-



EVAN SEAL / THE LEADER

Third grade students at Georges Vanier Elementary (from left) Samantha Dees, Kalihan Huntley, Rahul Reddy, Gabriel Halibas and Taranjot Dhoot are learning to say 'hello' in more than 30 different languages.

riorating playground and classroom etiquette.

"Manners," she explains, "what a funny word, I know. But common courtesy on the roads, in the hallways (at school) – it's sorely lacking."

Lutton says emotional intelligence – a social skill for perceiving and responding to one's own emotions and the emotions of others – is something that can be increased over time. With report cards now including a "social responsibility" score, right next to math and language arts, programs like those offered by Judi the Manners Lady will become more and more common and embedded in school curricula.

"We've already noticed a change in the building. Eye contact, courtesy, the level of enthusiasm and optimism just wasn't here last year."

She continues, "This is the Georges Vanier family, and we want our school to be a place of care versus just another institution."

Back in the hallway, the Grade 3s are still showing off their new social skills.

"When I go to parent-teacher night," says young Taranjot Dhoot, "I say, Mommy, this is my teacher. And I say to my teacher, this is my Mommy."

He smiles proudly.

"Everybody needs good manners!"

That last statement is straight out of Judi the Manners Lady's CD, It's fun to

have Good Manners.

Packed with songs like We Want to Obey Our Mom and Dad or Everyone Needs to Feel Special, the CD offers the kind of wisdom adults can use around the office too:

When I'm playing and I meet someone who's mean

And they're not being part of the team

If I say something kind, maybe they'll change their mind!

Everybody needs good manners!

For more information about Judi The Manners Lady, visit www.TheMannersClub.com.

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Bitten jogger 'lucky'

by Tracy Holmes

POLICE AND bylaw officials are looking for the owners of a collie-like dog after a jogger was bit in the groin in Sunnyside Acres last week.

The elementary school teacher, who lives in South Surrey, said he was running through the forest when he came upon an older couple walking their dog. As the jogger approached from behind, the dog suddenly turned and lunged, he said.

"When I came close, the dog turned around, jumped at me – right between the legs," the father of two said. "I was on the ground, screaming and moaning in pain."

The jogger, who asked not to be named, was about 300 metres along a trail that stretches in from 148 Street when the attack happened last Tuesday. The dog was on a leash, but the male owner said the dog "sometimes does that," referring to the canine's reaction.

"He said, 'If we had known you were coming, we would've held the dog better.' So they knew he ... could be vicious," the man said.

In hospital the teacher received five stitches, and was told by a urologist that he was "lucky."

"(The dog) didn't touch anything I will need," the man said.

Anyone with information is asked to call Surrey RCMP at 604-599-0502.

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NEWS

WINTERFEST DETAILS UNVEILED

A big party is planned for Whalley next February, as the city organizes a "WinterFest."

The event would include musical talent, food, and fireworks, for an estimated cost between \$120,000 and \$150,000. Surrey will provide \$20,000 in seed money while seeking the rest from corporate sponsors.

The city opted for WinterFest last July, when council chose not to organize First Night, a New Years Eve event described as expensive and under-attended.

WinterFest, scheduled for Feb. 9, 2008, will kick off Spirit Week, and is expected to help celebrate the coming of the 2010 Olympic Games.

Surrey council will discuss the plan Monday.