

Flowers, trees replace concrete at Marguerite

By Marcy Horwitz
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A garden now flourishes where an empty courtyard once stood at Marguerite Christian Elementary School.

Japanese dogwoods, Rose of Sharon trees, border grasses, mums, pansies, day lilies and morning glories all bloom in honor of Jacque Minarik, a nationally certified art teacher who taught at Marguerite Christian for six years.

When Minarik left the school to pursue other opportunities, the school rallied behind its beloved teacher to create the garden as a tribute. The Jacque Minarik Sunshine Garden was dedicated last May.

"Jacque brings out the creativity in both kids and adults," says Mandy W. Gray, a guidance counselor at Marguerite Christian. She described Minarik as a dedicated world traveler who incorporates the customs and design elements of other cultures into her own artwork and into her teaching as well.

Minarik's creativity has won her a National Art Teacher of the Year award and a Rotary scholarship, which allowed her to study in Japan. She is also a member of the Teachers Advisory Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Students, parents, teachers and others came together to establish the garden. The school's PTA donated a fountain for the space, adorned with Marguerite Christian's mascot, a lion. The parent group also donated tables and umbrellas. When it was time to install the plants, the PTA provided the necessary manpower, and the group has pledged to maintain the garden going forward.

The school's Boy Scout troop made a mosaic bird bath.

Christopher Alton, a VCU student,

sculpted a tortoise for the courtyard. Marguerite Christian's fifth graders were only



Elli Morris/Chesterfield Observer

Merenda Garnett-Krantz, an art teacher at Marguerite Christian Elementary School, and seven-year-old Jordan Blevins spend time in the school's new garden.

too happy to apply bits of colored glass and stones to "Terri the Turtle." In future years, departing fifth graders will add to the mosaic turtle as a tribute to the time they spent at Marguerite Christian.

Minarik herself designed the stone gardens and painted the benches and a planter.

Today, the garden is used as a "good behavior space." It's a favorite reading spot for students, and teachers often eat their lunches in the garden. Art classes also meet there.

"It's a nice focal point for the school," says Gray.

Let the race begin!

This time of year is marked by competition for best costume design, most creative Halloween cookies and best decorated front entrance.

I was in a shoe department last week and overheard two women talking. One said she had pumpkin-shaped cookies already baked and in her freezer, ready for the Halloween party her third grader was having at school. The other said she had stayed up late finishing her son's Power Ranger costume, so he could wear it to preschool.

I still remember my son's reaction two decades ago when I handed him a platter of round cookies with red frosting to take to school for his Halloween party. "They don't look like pumpkins," he said.

"I forgot I was out of yellow food coloring," I said. "Just tell everyone red pumpkins are new."

"Who's Chuck Finn, and why does this shirt smell like coffee?" he asked when I handed him his costume. They didn't have much selection in ready-made costumes back then, and he absolutely refused to be Mickey Mouse.

"I used coffee to stain your Dad's old white shirt," I explained. "And it's Huck Finn. He was a cool guy who wore old shirts."



Loose Ends
Susan Nienow

One year I made a cape red on one side and black on the other. So my daughter was Little Red Riding Hood one year, and my son was Dracula the next. I wanted him to be Zorro, but he insisted he had never heard of the guy.

All of this led up to one night of trick-or-treating where the kids used pillow cases to carry their treats. It brought to mind pictures of happy, excited kids going from house to house, impressing the occupants with their fresh-faced enthusiasm.

I remember the year my daughter was scared of all the people in costumes in the dark, but wouldn't go home or she would be a chicken, her brother informed her. So instead of saying "Trick or Treat" when the door opened, she cried, "I don't want to be a chicken."

Feeling slightly sorry he had caused his sister so much pain, her brother finally quieted her by offering her all of his boxes of raisins at the end of the evening. Happy with anything from her older brother, she smiled through her tears, never realizing that boxes of raisins tied for number 47 on the treat popularity list, right after cans of green beans.

Halloween used to be the perfect opportunity to buy my favorite candy guilt-free. If I bought the bags of candy too early, I ate them all before "the day" and suffered from extreme guilt. So I learned to time the buy - the stores still had my favorites, but I didn't have to control myself too long.

One year I miscalculated and ran out of candy before the doorbell quit ringing. After the kids went to bed I snatched a few from the kids' stash. The next morning before breakfast my son yelled from his bedroom, "Who ate three of my Snickers?"



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