

Pilgrims' pride exhibited at McDonald Elementary

By Clayton C. Walsh, correspondent | Posted: Monday, November 23, 2015 4:00 pm

The operative word was "cold" for about 150 fifth-graders who left the comfort of their usual classrooms and stepped outside McDonald Elementary School in Warminster early Monday morning.

For teacher Joe Pisacano, the frosty conditions were just perfect as he lay out his wooden, bone and stone wares across a huge fox-skin rug and in front of a roaring hardwood fire.

"We are trying to re-create an environment and show the hardships the pilgrims lived in," said Pisacano, who has led the school's annual Pilgrim Fest program for the past 17 years. "It's windy and cold today. They are going to get a true sense of what it was like" in North America in 1620.

The idea was born when Pisacano first took a class outside to talk about a time when corn husk dolls and shooting marbles through a knicker box were as popular as iPhones and video games.

Piscano's class rotated through learning stations that focused on Colonial gardening, games, flat black hat construction and the corn husk dolls that had 10-year-old Bridget McEachern and a few friends somewhat perplexed.

"I wouldn't have been able to survive without my phone," Bridget said while gluing a thick wisp of husk to hold together her doll's torso. "Without my phone, life is nothing. You're going to hear that from a lot of us."

Rylee Lynch, 11, conceded she might find other interests had she lived during the 1600s. "I would like the fishing. That would be OK," she said.

Bridget and 10-year-old Allison Carlino eventually agreed that fishing might be the way to go.

The cold conditions set the stage well for Pisacano's emphasis on the role of the fire and home hearth for Colonists who had no other sources of heat in winter.

"The hearth was the heart of the house. It's what kept them alive," said Pisacano, who has taught at the school for 26 years.

Placing his newly constructed black cockel hat on his head as the girls made bonnets, 10-year-old Zach Stanfield agreed that fire was indeed important.



McDonald Elementary teacher Joe Pisacano teaches fifth-graders about the true hardships faced by the Pilgrims for the 17th annual Thanksgiving Fest at their Warminster school on Monday, Nov. 23, 2015.

“We learned that they needed the fire, and they also had the Mayflower Compact, which was a letter written to them,” said Zach. “They thought they were in Virginia. We’ve studied it the whole year so far.”

The country’s first governing document aside, Zach seemed impressed at the entire effort.

“This is definitely all interesting stuff.”