

Students work to “change” the world

Maxwell Elementary Spanish immersion students have been collecting spare change to provide relief for victims of the recent earthquake in Peru. In addition to benefiting people in need, the “Pennies for Peru” service learning project infused a humanitarian spirit into classroom learning.

“We wanted this to be different,” said Principal Heather Bell who was approached by teachers to start the project. “It was a good real world opportunity to make connections between our school, which is a Spanish immersion school, and a Spanish speaking country.”

Teachers began weaving instruction about Peru – the country, the people and the culture – into classes like science, social studies and reading for grades 2-5, which put a human face on the service project.

“It’s important for kids to learn that earthquakes are more than a textbook concept,” said teacher Nadxi Alquicira, who survived an earthquake in Mexico City in 1985.

Second-grade twins Sidney and Simone Bibbs took money out of their piggy banks to donate to the cause. And with the help of family and friends from their church, they collected \$115.19. School-wide, Maxwell collected more than \$2,000 for the American Red Cross.

“We wanted to help because a lot of people in Peru are really sad because they had an earthquake and don’t have a home,” said Simone.

The Bibbs’ generous contribution hit close to home for Maxwell teacher and Peruvian Sara Szwilski.

“In this moment that my country is in great need it’s great to see my students so involved,” said Szwilski.

“This has changed Maxwell because it has made the whole school more aware that there are people outside of Lexington who may need our help,” said Alquicira.

“Winning a fundraising contest wasn’t as important as the act of giving itself so, for the first time, our classrooms weren’t in competition with each other to see who could raise the most money,” said Bell. “We wanted the students to feel good about just giving. We’ll never do a fundraiser the old way again.”