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OSU field trip opens possibilities

■ McCall students learn about college, careers, throughout 4th grade

Leslie Pugmire Hole

Spokesman staff

Twenty-seven was the mind-bending number – 27 parents wanting to chaperone a field trip for 33 students.

What was so exciting that the majority of Heather Renz's fourth-grade parents wanted to tag along? Weekend in Vegas? Floor seats to a Blazer Game?

College – 27 parents wanted to be a

part of what for many was their child's first exposure to life on a college campus.

"I just want the kids to be able to say 'This could be me in eight years,'" said Renz, now in her 29th year of teaching.

Three fourth-grade classes from Tom McCall Elementary have or will be visiting Oregon State University, only one part of a year-long push by their teachers to make college an everyday part of the vocabulary for the 10-year-olds.

The all-day field trips include lunch in the university food court (with their own meal card just like the college kids), a tour of Gill Coliseum, and a visit to a dorm hall, the library, bookstore and classrooms.

The highlight for Renz's students, the

big event they buzzed about for weeks before the Oct. 27 visit, was the Hinsdale Wave Research Lab. The lab contains the largest tsunami simulator in the world, a pool with a multi-directional wave-maker and a scale model of Seaside, Ore. at its end.

In preparation for the trip Renz's students worked on designing tsunami evacuation structures that could withstand the tsunamis triggered in the simulation pool.

During the field trip student-built structures were bolted to the seafront of the Seaside model and a tsunami was triggered to test their effectiveness.

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Before the field trip the students displayed optimism about the success of their designs. One girl pointed out that her two-story design was especially beneficial because "there's not as much chance to get wet." One boy touted the fences he designed in front of his evacuation center; sure they would diminish the damage of the oncoming waves.

For their scale structures the students had six square panels and 20 posts of wood, as well as a wood slab for a base, to build their evacuation centers, all held together with double-sided foam tape.

Partners Kjersten Schmidt and Johanna Geisen designed their structure like a boat, with its angle pointing towards the sea so when the monster waves arrived it would be diverted to each side. Another pair of girls built their evacuation center using the posts like "shrimp's tails" for balance, they said.

"This is gonna be so cool," one boy predicted, showing off his design of a multi-story tower.

What's cool for Renz is seeing the students get revved about college, any college.

"Ten years ago we never talked college with kids this age," she said. But Renz and her fellow teachers have made the gradual philosophical shift to introducing post-sec-



submitted photo

Heather Renz (far left) and her fourth-grade class from Tom McCall Elementary, explore Oregon State University. The class is studying about colleges and careers all year long.

"college bucks" as rewards to her students for various accomplishments.

Sam Manselle proudly showed off his wad of cash, each denomination depicting a different university.

Renz, a Beaver herself, put University of Oregon on the smallest bill, \$1. That's the only prejudice she shows, encouraging the students to research universities all over the world to find the ones that suit them best.

"For some of these kids, this will be the first time they've set foot on a college cam-

pus, not when it gets here."

Kyler Timmerman was one of those students.

"I really like the Beavers and I like the idea of getting to see a college," he said, sitting in a classroom splattered with university banners and the words "Where will you go to college?"

"This is the time for them to set a goal," Renz said. "Not where they're going to go necessarily or what they're going to study