

Serving students a Thanksgiving stuffed with love and support

As students and teachers wrapped up the last day of class before Thanksgiving, schools throughout the district paused to give thanks on Tuesday.

At Garfield Elementary, it was a day set aside for family and the community. After all it's tradition, and Thanksgiving's meant for tradition and family. So fourth-grade teacher Tina Barnes and the cafeteria workers and parent helpers got to work.

Principal Marianne Bailey started the tradition when she became principal at Garfield Elementary seven years ago. She said she realized many of the students may not get an opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving. She got the team together as teachers brought in boxes of mashed potatoes and cooked turkeys, preparing much of the food in their classrooms.



Bailey said the next year Marion City Schools Food Services Supervisor Winnie Brewer offered to get the food service department involved. Someone else suggested seeing if Tri-Rivers Career Center's culinary department could cook the turkeys. A tradition was born.



The cooks spent Monday afternoon preparing and resumed cooking and preparing the food on Tuesday morning. Barnes, who has organized the celebration for six years, came down to the cafeteria to offer support.

"It's very busy, but it's a great way to show our kids we are a family," she said. "It is amazing. They get to sit down with their family, with the people who tell them that they love them every day."

The day is about community, a school community as the staff and parents pitch in and help. It goes beyond that as Marion County Sheriff's Office

deputies and staff from the Multi-County Correctional Center volunteer to serve the food.

"The kids love it," said Bailey, whose husband is Marion County Sheriff Tim Bailey. She said she wanted to involve law enforcement so that the students could see "that cops are good people."

The cooks prepare more than 400 servings of turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, dressing, green beans and pumpkin pie. Students design the placemats for the tables. Head cook Jane Metz said it's nice to see all the students together celebrating Thanksgiving with the staff.

"It's something they always remember," she said.

For Barnes and other staff, it's a gift of love for the students. She strolled down the hall before Tuesday's meal wearing a stuffed turkey on her head.

"We can do this in an hour," she said, talking about how the meal is served and cleaned up within an hour. "We're a well-oiled machine."

She sees the day as an opportunity to bring some community spirit and support into the school and to give the students a lesson in leadership, showing them that the staff, district administrators and community members do care about them.



"It's a good way for our kids to see the leaders of our community," she said, tying it into the school's The Leader in Me program.

That's not all it is for Barnes, a Marion native who decided to come back and teach in Marion City Schools.



"This community has been good to me," she said. "It is about me giving back to the community, showing kids someone loves them."

"Their faces is what it's all about. It's that gratitude, the whole school coming together. The PTA buys the turkeys. It's about those kids and the smiles on their faces, letting them know they are loved."

"There is a lot of caring in this building, lots of love," Bailey said. "We have said for years that we are a family."