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Kendale Lakes Elementary serves needs of students and community

BY DONNA SHELLEY

Kendale Lakes Elementary School (KLE) is the kind of learning center that restores one's faith in the future of American education. A fully vested partner in the community, KLE has a sterling record of serving the needs of its students, building a strong corps of adult volunteers and instilling pride of place.

One shining example of community involvement, among many is that related by Martha Jaureguizar, school principal. The students and faculty wanted to recognize the victims at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. But they were informed that continued contributions were no longer needed. The decision was made to make a memorial at KLE by planting two trees and placing 26 stepping stones inscribed with the names of the victims. A member of the community with a son at KLE immediately offered to provide the trees free of charge and to plant them as well.

KLE opened some 50 years ago and has had two additions, and a program to update the physical plant. Updating includes providing the teaching tools that will reflect the technological advances necessary to educate children in the 21st Century.

"God bless our superintendent [Alberto Carvalho] and the people of Miami-Dade County for the new bond [issue of \$1.2 billion]. It was the answer to our prayers," Jaureguizar said.

When Jaureguizar became the principal in 2010, she asked her teaching staff what they believed was important for their success with the students. The majority said that they needed improved technology within the classroom. In support of that, the school has launched a program to purchase "SMART Boards" to outfit each classroom with the aid of funds from donations, support from the school district and parent-



Kendale Lakes Elementary students work at individual computers.

teacher groups.

The SMART board is an interactive whiteboard that operates electronically in concert with a computer, a projector and appropriate software. Students and teachers can work at the SMART board much like a whiteboard, inputting with their finger or special "pen." Available software designed to satisfy the needs of a given curriculum or grade level is used, beginning with children in pre-kindergarten classes.

The success realized with this new technology has been a boon to all students, including those with special needs. Test scores and grades have markedly improved in a short period of time.

As a Title I school for pre-K to fifth grade students, 77 percent of KLE's student body is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The 730-strong student body is comprised of Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian,

Gifted and Special Education children. A top performing school, KLE is has garnered a number of accolades, including being named a five-star school by the Florida Department of Education. Another honor is that in the 2013-14 academic year KLE will become a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) School.

"Our school is blessed with an eager team, willing to learn," Jaureguizar said.

KLE prides itself on the success of its programs for gifted students, self-contained full inclusion for special education students, and English language learners, among other hands-on programs.

Teacher Andrea Waters said of KLE, "It is very heartfelt here. We are a community within a community."

KLE is located at 8000 SW 142 Ave. Contact the office at 305-385-2575 and visit online at < <http://kle.dadeschools.net> >.