

'Walk Around the World' funded by grant

Thanks to an award-winning idea of PTA presidents Leah Gomberg and Cecelia Cancellaro, the entire South Orange-Maplewood community will be able to "Walk Around the World" and experience the cultures, customs and languages of four countries, without ever leaving Maplewood.

The event, scheduled for Feb. 13 from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Clinton Elementary School, is being funded by a \$1,897 National PTA grant won by the two PTA presidents. The grant, for which 340 schools across the country applied, was one of only 32 awarded and the only one given to a New Jersey school. In its notification to Clinton School, the National PTA stated that, "Your event is definitely one of the most original ideas we received." The Clinton School program will give "travelers" an opportunity to visit China, Ghana, Haiti and Spain, and to experience the music, art, language and food of each country. The evening will conclude in the school's auditorium where the tourists will be treated to short performances featuring the cultures of each country.

Of course, as with all international travel, attendees will go through a customs station and will be issued passports. Maps will also be distributed to guide them through their tour. The countries to be visited were chosen after consultation with Clinton families and teachers and based on consideration of the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the student population at the school.

The National PTA awarded the grant in recognition of National Take Your Family to School Week. Gomberg and Cancellaro won the grant by creating a unique and interactive celebration of diversity that will involve and welcome the entire school community.

"Eight of the 32 schools who received the grant are getting a visit from a National PTA officer," said Cancellaro. "We're very excited because Clinton School will receive one of these visits from Chuck Saylor, the National PTA president-elect, who will present the award to us on the evening of the event."

Cancellaro added, "In addition to the president-elect, the president of AXA Financial, the company sponsoring the grants, will also attend the Clinton event." Gomberg said she was pleased that so many parents, teachers and community members were offering to help. "The excitement is just building," she said. "A local Chinese dance troupe has offered to be a part of this as well as a teacher from Tuscan School who, with a partner, will demonstrate Flamenco dancing. These are only a few of the many international experiences the event has to offer. The two presidents explained that the ESL program has had a very enriching impact on the school for some time. Through a grant from the South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation, Clinton Principal Patricia O'Neill had the school's newsletter translated into Spanish and Haitian Creole. The PTA has created an international cookbook, sponsors an international, family-oriented dinner each spring and has posted directional signs in five languages in the hallways.

"Walk Around the World is an event that came to fruition because of the pride and dedication of our PTA and the realization that Clinton School is an international school," said Clinton Principal Patricia O'Neill. "Cecelia Cancellaro not only had the great foresight to include us in this competition but then wrote the grant that showcases our diversity and talents. With Cecelia and Leah's leadership and our very talented Clinton School community, Walk Around the World is another in the many events that fosters our commitment to work together to maintain our global community."