

# The St. Petersburg Times

## Chocachatti's *MicroSociety* mirrors the real world

St. Petersburg Times - December 21, 2006

By Maryan Pelland

The program gives elementary school students a taste of adulthood with jobs in government, the arts and other industries.

For seven years, Chocachatti Elementary's *MicroSociety* has thrilled visitors with its Winter Wonderland evening. This year was no different as the campus came alive with sounds and sights of holiday shopping and entertainment. The evening showcases student work in the *MicroSociety* program, sort of like the real world in a parallel universe. There are governments, merchants, show-biz people, manufacturers, services and every other aspect of a functioning adult society - but the oldest residents are fifth-graders, and the youngest are kindergarteners.

Since August, each *MicroSociety* student has worked in a job they competed to get. They are paid in micros (10 micros to the U.S. dollar) and they have to manage their money and bills such as rent, utilities and production supplies.

There are, of course, those talented people who make it in the arts - they perform for audiences at Winter Wonderland. A theater urchin stands at the entrance collecting micros for starving artists and performers so they can go on with their work.



"Sometimes kids want to know what a particular class can do for them. They can clearly see this experience relating to their futures," Foote said.

These are not cut and paste projects. A company called Painting Funanza makes greeting cards with registered copyrights. Crafty Cooks Bakery sells holiday cookies and Treasured Trash vends soda bottles re-engineered into decorative fish. Some groups manage the lighting and staging for theater productions. Kindergarteners create a class musical. Crimestoppers are on duty to keep the market safe and ensure no one gets into trouble.

Foote summed it up, "At parent night each April, I get comments from students and parents. They're amazed at what's been learned and how responsible students become."

But most Micro citizens work in manufacturing, marketing or service businesses. They make or break their budgets selling goods and services to family and friends who come to shop.

While it's all in fun, and 95 percent of the kids attend the event voluntarily, there is a seriousness about it, says coordinator Norma Foote.

"If a student wants their first-choice job next year, they have to do well in performance reviews this year," Foote said.

Students do it all themselves, with mentoring. Once they're trained, adults step back some and let the kids fly. There are managers and worker bees. Foote says nothing is overlooked. Right down to the bags items are put into at sale time, students think it through and come up with sophisticated ideas.