

WELCOME TO OUR
Doris Dillon Newsletter
we're so glad you're here!



IT'S BEEN A WHILE..

Two Worlds Collide

By: Nikita Anand (High School Volunteer)

In February 2023, a group of twelve students from Leland, along with parent volunteers, embarked on a journey to Cambodia to make a difference in the lives of children at the Doris Dillon School. The volunteers were immersed in a unique and hands-on curriculum that covered a wide range of subjects from science to music. In just two days, the group was able to make a meaningful impact on the students.

Maya Krishnaswamy, a freshman at Leland, who was responsible for teaching CPR at the school, shared her experience saying, "I loved teaching the students about CPR because many of them didn't know how to react in an emergency." Teaching the children about the things we often take for granted such as first aid, health, and hygiene, helped us be more aware of the world around us.

Despite the language and cultural barriers, the connection that was formed between the volunteers and students was indescribable. The students' wide smiles and endless love and affection conveyed more than words ever could. Initially concerned about how to connect with the children, the volunteers soon realized that the language of love and kindness transcends all barriers. The students' eagerness to take pictures with the volunteers was evidence of this, with little girls pleading for a picture to post on their Instagram story. Saanvi Khanna, a sophomore at Leland recounts, "Once we'd reach the hotel, we'd check our Instagrams and it would be swarmed with our pictures and cute DMs from the students." The three days spent at the school were three days of pure celebratory treatment.

Through this wonderful experience at Doris Dillon, the volunteers learned so much from not only one another but also from the students. With memories to last a lifetime, the volunteers are eager to make their return in the near future.

DDS Student Life





Our Dedicated Volunteers

By: Jim DeLong (Founder of DDS)

Much of the success of this trip resulted from our board member, Lydia Gmerek, and her daughter, Sofie. Who both put in incredibly long hours of planning and creating the class schedule for the 166 7th–9th grade students at Doris Dillon School. Since the internet connectivity at the school is quite poor, Lydia also coordinated the purchase and installation of a RACHEL server— a computer with an abundant amount of educational software, downloaded from the internet and available in both Khmer and English. With the help of RACHEL, our teachers and students can now access this educational software wirelessly from our computers, teachers’ laptops, and our library’s Amazon Fire 7 tablets.

Along with the intense preparation from Lydia and Sofie, here are some of the highlights of the 4 other volunteer families’ work:

THE ANAND'S:

- Nikita Anand (Sophomore at Leland student)
- Supriya Sairam (“My heart is full” and compassionate mom)

Supriya and Nikita used RAFT kits to teach hands-on science activities to all 166 students. Some of these activities included creating fizzy rockets using alka-seltzer tablets and water along with puff rockets which used straws and squeeze bottles. They also used the 100+ donated magnifying glasses to have students examine and draw the nature surrounding them in finer detail.

THE KRISHNASWAMY'S:

- Maya Krishnaswamy (Freshman at Leland)
- Zara Krishnaswamy (A fearless 5th grader at Williams)
- Kim Trang and Aravind Krishnaswamy (“No job too daunting” mother and technically brilliant father)

Kim, Maya, and Zara taught CPR to all 166 students using adult and infant inflatable dummies donated by Lydia Gmerek, and also planned projects with Girls Leadership officers and taught them how to show other students how to access ebooks on the new tablets. Aravind also helped teach students and teachers how to access content on the RACHEL server, and installed software for our library’s many ebooks on the Fire 7 tablets

THE WRIGHT'S:

- Nichola Wright (Super pro-teacher and mom)
- Isabel Wright (Freshman at Leland)
- Kyle Wright (Junior at Leland and a great boys’ health role model)

Kyle taught boys’ health to all 87 7th-9th grade boys. He also helped students perform the famous Coke and Mentos experiment. Nichola and Isabel taught Girls’ Health to all 79 7th-9th grade girls. Nichola and Isabel also planned community projects with Girls Leadership Club officers. They showed them how to teach other students how to access ebooks and educational software on the new Fire 7 tablets.

THE KHANNA'S:

- Syna Khanna (Freshman at NYU and founder of the Leland JAW Club)
- Saanvi Khanna (Sophomore at Leland and president of JAW Club)
- Manish Khanna (Technically brilliant father)

Syna and Saanvi taught Basic Health to all 166 students: proper hand washing and teeth-brushing techniques, first aid (Sofie Gmerek made first aid kits for all students), and anti-smoking demonstrations. Manish helped teach all students and teachers how to access content on the RACHEL server. He also installed software for our library’s many ebooks on the Fire 7 tablets.

Sony and Pich, two university students and scholarship recipients, worked as invaluable translators. Months ago, Sony contacted us, wanting to work with someone to improve her English, with Nikita graciously volunteering to work with her online.

One of the unexpected highlights was when Sony invited Nikita and others who were interested, to travel during lunch to her home to meet her family. Nikita rode on the back of Sony’s motor scooter and nine of us followed her there. It was a beautiful drive with green rice fields for miles on either side of us, as well as an incredibly moving and insightful experience.

Architect and larger-than-life human, Bill Gould, and his guitar traveled with us. Bill owns the architectural firm Artik and has designed and installed public art for local public structures and museums and at over 35 Bay Area schools. Many of his pieces reside in Poland, where he and his wife lived for many years. Throughout the course of the trip, Bill sketched site plans and possible design ideas while also sourcing potential materials for a public art piece at our school. Bill also taught Doris’ favorite song “You Are My Sunshine” to many students who held an impromptu sing-along on our last day.

Thanks once again to Lydia’s efforts, four seniors from Liger Leadership Academy— Sakseth, Vitou, Narak, and Panarith— volunteered to provide technical help and teach Arduino circuit design/programming prototyping to a select group of students. They also taught teachers and students how to use them to access educational content on the RACHEL server. In addition, to help guide students and teachers about the RACHEL server, they all worked as translators, adding their personal stories, to Kyle Wright’s Boys’ Health classes. Their maturity and command of English (and Sakseth’s guitar playing) impressed us all.

The students we met gave us such wonderful lasting memories: their gifts of blooming lotus flowers and the many selfies they asked to take with us are just two of many priceless moments. It’s this that creates the urge upon leaving to return.



Sharing a Year of Success

By: Denise DeLong (Board Member)

On April 28, 2023, Bret Harte Middle School (7050 Bret Harte Drive in San Jose) will host a Cultural Fair, celebrating the diversity and commonality of its student body families. This year the Doris Dillon School in Cambodia will participate in a Silent Auction to raise money for girls' scholarships. Girls who qualify come from the poorest families in that part of Cambodia. A mere \$17 a month allows a family to keep their daughter in school. Our onsite director SaVeng monitors these girls' attendance & grades to be sure they remain qualified.

Doris Dillon School began with the Invisible Issues Club at Bret Harte, which Jim DeLong moderated for years. In 2007, they heard about the opportunity of building a school in rural Cambodia and knew they could raise the funds. When you build a school, you get to name it, and they unanimously decided the new Middle School in Cambodia should be named after Doris Dillon, a favorite teacher from Graystone & Williams Elementary schools, was diagnosed with ALS, yet continued teaching, but sadly passed away in 2001. Her friends, family, and colleagues immediately joined the project, and by 2008, the school was built. Bret Harte is Doris Dillon's sister school as well, and we're thrilled to acquaint the current students with this amazing legacy.

The festival will run from 4:30 to 7. Look for us there!

Who Doesn't Love Our Fundraisers?

On **September 9, 2023**, we're hosting our annual donor thank you and fundraiser at the **Almaden Golf & Country Club from 4 to 7pm**. We are anxious to share with you all the exciting news of the past year: returning to work at Doris Dillon School with 18 volunteers, and meeting with Kep Gardens, and Don Bosco. We will again feature 2 cork pull events: \$100 & \$200 corks which represent wine packages worth more than you will pay for those corks! We'll also have a Silent Auction with fabulous items donated by the Board of Directors or nonprofits and merchants in the Almaden community and Bay Area.