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“Our Chicago” – seeing visions

By Patrick T. Reardon on Fri., 10/02/2009 –8:15 am.

Second of two

“Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions.” --- Joel 2:28

As I wrote last time, the young men and women of the fifth grade at St. Bede the Venerable elementary school on the Southwest Side had a class assignment earlier this year to see visions.

St. Bede was part of a neighborhood-to-neighborhood program at 76 Catholic grade schools, sponsored by the Big Shoulders Fund. The idea was to study a community in another part of the city; get to know the fifth graders of a Catholic school there; and then come up with plans for the neighborhood’s future.

The kids at St. Bede at 4440 W. 83rd St. were assigned the Lakeview community.

And the visions they saw?

Windmills in the lake.

“A wind farm of six to twelve windmills could be ‘planted’ out in the harbor and in various spots around the Lakeview area to provide power for the community...It would be a clean, safe, and GREEN way to improve the Lakeview area,” the children wrote.

That fanciful idea was one of dozens that the 60 St. Bede fifth graders developed after visiting with their counterparts at St. Andrew grade school at 1701 W. Addison St.

Others included rain-storing systems outside of homes (for use in watering lawns), a community farm, solar panels (or windmills) on the roof of Wrigley Field, more

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ABOUT THIS BLOG

This blog is about history, planning and the future. It’s rooted in the recognition that we live in a world that is created by plans – and by the failure to make plans. [\[MORE\]](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Patrick T. Reardon](#) is a Chicagoan, born and bred. He has been writing about the city, its region and planning issues, mainly in the Chicago Tribune, for nearly 40 years. [\[MORE\]](#)

trees, more parks and “a tree/plant day...when everybody plants a plant.”

Where are your parks?

Rick Guerin, the animated St. Bede principal, says the trip to St. Andrew was an eye-opening one for his students: “Our kids were amazed: ‘Where are your parks? Where are your malls? Where do you play baseball?’”

Lakeview is a generally affluent neighborhood where many residents live in multi-unit buildings. By contrast, most people in middle-class Ashburn, St. Bede’s community, have single-family homes. There are three parks near St. Bede, but the students at St. Andrew only have Lincoln Park, a mile and a half to the east and across Lake Shore Drive.

“We learned a lot more than if we had done our own neighborhood,” Guerin says.

The visit to St. Andrew and the research on Lakeview gave the St. Bede students a sense of the broader world --- a world outside the narrow confines of their everyday lives. It gave them insight into how their world is different from the world in which the Lakeview children live --- and, yet, despite the 20-mile distance between their neighborhoods, how much they share.

"We looked out ourselves"

“And, by looking at another neighborhood,” Guerin says, “we looked at ourselves. Coming up with questions they could ask, they could only ask from their knowledge of their own neighborhood.”

So seeing visions wasn’t limited to windmills in the lake.

For the St. Bede fifth graders, it was seeing their links to the rest of the city --- and the rest of the world.

And seeing themselves more clearly.