

One of a Kind:

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and the people who create them

Story and Photos By Chris Bertrand

### **Extreme Classroom Makeover at John Marshall**

John Marshall Fundamental School, on Allen in northeast Pasadena, ranked 130th in a Newsweek's current ranking of the top public high schools in the nation. Using Newsweek's ratio dividing the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and/or Cambridge tests taken by all students at a school in 2006 by the number of graduating seniors, Marshall ranked 10th in California's schools in that same evaluation. Yet 70 per cent of the student population falls beneath the poverty line.

English teacher, Patricia Kavanagh is known for her Herculean efforts to identify a myriad of college scholarship opportunities for her students. EXPO Corporation, manufacturer of dry erase markers and boards, once again offered \$1,000 for college scholarship funds to student essay winners on the topic, "Why My Teacher Deserves a Classroom Makeover". The winning teacher would receive a \$25,000 classroom makeover. Kavanagh encouraged her students to enter and write about a special teacher. Chosen from over 10,000 entries, Kavanagh's own student, Samantha Stauber wrote the grand prize winning essay, featuring this special teacher herself. In fact, three of the nine finalist essays came from Marshall.

Obviously something good is happening at this academically strong school. Kavanagh commented that the preponderance of Marshall's budget dollars go to the books and learning materials needed to drive this commendable school's programs. Little is left over for niceties.

She chuckles wryly about the state of the classroom before the makeover. "It was a pit. My desk drawers had been broken for years, and sat next to my desk on the floor. It was drab. There was no color in the room; everything was in a pale eggshell color. Color was the most startling and most powerful change." Right in line with what EXPO's classroom research, their company website indicates, "Both color and technology are important components for learning, indispensable in today's changing classrooms. In fact, a recent survey commissioned by EXPO\* found that virtually all teachers strive to integrate color in their teaching materials... to get students' attention and help them to concentrate and retain information. The 2007 EXPO Classroom Makeover Contest aimed to enhance learning by adding color to dust; drab classrooms with a \$25,000 colorful classroom overhaul." For Kavanagh, this included a bold new color palette of gold, purple and lime green, repaired and refinished hardwood flooring, a carpeted area, a seating area under the windows, new desks and chairs, updated technology including a mimio interactive whiteboard system and, of course EXPO dry erase boards and those famous colorful markers.

Co-sponsored by EXPO/Sanford and Scholastic, St. Louis based designer, Jessie Goedeker was sent to identify Kavanagh's classroom needs. "They look around the country for dynamic young

designers intrigued by the notion of how to make classrooms look vibrant. Jessie was incredible, and really listened to what I needed. One of my problems was clutter. Instead of locked cabinets, the open storage forces me to organize."

Local Pasadena flooring contractor, Marla Jakovljevic of Pasadena Wood Floors, was referred to the project through her association with the National Wood Flooring Association (NFWA). She coordinated not only the refurbishment of the decades old wood Douglas fir flooring, but also the custom designed seating and cabinetry. Jakovljevic, a first generation immigrant of Filipino descent, was drawn to the project in a school with many first generation immigrants, as she herself came here as a young adult, with English as a second language. She prizes and prioritizes learning for her own children, and considered this a great opportunity to give back to her Pasadena community.

Completed in only a week, the unveiling was a poignant moment for Kavanagh. Essay winner, Stauber, tore through the wrapping, bringing her teacher into the newly completed room at a special ceremony and assembly on May 18. Kavanagh says "What an amazing difference! The built-in seating nook on the side provides intimacy and makes the students feel special. I think of it as a piece of art! It's all beautiful, very durable, attractive and great quality!"

The new 2007 makeover essay contest is open for submissions until October 15. Full rules are available at EXPO's website link at [www.expoclassroommakeover.com](http://www.expoclassroommakeover.com), inviting K-12 teachers nationwide to submit a classroom photo and write an essay of no more than 100 words describing why their classroom deserve a makeover.