

# Kids Stuff

## Riverview students are helping create a full-length film

By **MICHAEL WHITNEY**

**SNOHOMISH** — Making a movie for the big screen takes patience, collaboration and teamwork.

Just ask the fourth, fifth and sixth graders of Kimberlee Spaetig-Peterson's class at Riverview Elementary.

The students are voicing, painting and storyboarding scenes for "The WonderGrove Wizard of Oz," which will be uniquely marketed as the first full-length, student-created animation film in history. It's set to premiere in August at Hollywood's famous Grauman's Chinese Theatre, and the class is fundraising to swing down to L.A. this summer to see it and participate in an animation conference. A Snohomish premiere is scheduled for August or September.

The characters are computer-animated with Wonder Media's Story Maker, a software program geared for teaching animation in classrooms.

The twist to this Wizard of Oz is that Dorothy is a sixth grader hesitant about going to middle school.

One group is reading through the script that will be recorded right in Riverview's studio before being sent to the production team. The key here is to project your voice and enunciate, which means to speak clearly.

Another set of teams are doing detail work to fill in graphic backgrounds for the movie.

At a storyboarding table, the read-throughs are collaborative. The six students spoke one at a time with their ideas.

Every element is being critiqued and updated among the students themselves. They're looking at the scene from every angle, taking

ideas into script directions and graphics changes.

The scene they worked on last week is when Dorothy arrives at her new school, a pivotal moment.

"We had the original script and took ideas in the group and made the script fit," Hazel Woolsey, 12, said.

Ella Marzolf, 11, helped rewrite the scene.

The students use Microsoft Paint 3D to set up the landscapes and background graphics.

They had to use math to align the RGB palettes to Wonder Studio's specifications, and calibrate the colors in each landscape panel. Calibrating is for continuity — to make sure the colors constantly look the same as the background changes behind the characters moving in a scene.

Not that they gave their own accents. In a castle, "we put cracks in the wall and cobwebs to make it more realistic," said Brody Strandt, 12.

For the yellow brick road, Tyler Gildersleeve-Stiles, 11, drew in the map Dorothy encounters.

Brooklyn Johnson, 10, worked on the cornfields along the Yellow Brick Road, and drew details zoomed in to the level of cornstalks, her mom said. It's about adding depth.

"It becomes fun by working on a team," Brooklyn said.

Is it tedious? "Sometimes," Gabby Wetzel, 12, says with a grin while working with her team on the castle scenes. The work's "made me contemplate on wanting to go into graphic design," Gabby said.

In the studio erected in a portable classroom, the voices are captured by a professional microphone into a computer.

An 18-second snippet to



Photo courtesy Wonder Media

The Riverview Elementary class helping create "The WonderGrove Wizard of Oz" walked in the Snohomish Easter Parade this April.

voice an excited crowd cheering the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Lion takes four tries over about 20 minutes to ensure it's just right.

Seth Haney, 9, and his peers watch the audio levels and check the results for interruptive noises.

Directions are called out from hearing each take:

"Cut the whistling," Gabby said.

"Don't stomp!" while doing the cheers, Braden Kallstrom, 12, said.

The Snohomish Lions Club funded Riverview's studio equipment.

A similar animation program is at the Snohomish Boys & Girls Club, and Wonder Media waived the license fee costs for the software, Lions Club president Michael Edwards said.

Riverview is among 40 schools from 12 states preparing scenes for the film. Each scene is localized;

for Snohomish, the middle school is Centennial.

So who's leading the studio and the company? Wonder Media's CEO Terry Thoren.

Any '90s kid with cable television may remember Nickelodeon's "Rugrats"? The animation studio Klasky-Csupo made it; Thoren came on board as its CEO in 1994, and put Tommy Pickles' band of toddlers and babies onto the big screen with three full-length films.

The shows "The Wild Thornberrys" and "Rocket Power" also premiered in the late '90s under his watch.

Thoren left Klasky-Csupo in the mid-2000s.

A European developer created the computer-animated program that Thoren has propelled. His goal is to use it to have kids learn life skills while having fun.

Animation requires writing a script, projecting one's voice to give characters something

to say and math to calibrate color palettes and drawing.

Story Maker is the vehicle to apply skills in storytelling.

Thoren, 67, has spent his entire life using screen to tell stories. He splits his time between home in Snohomish and his studio in L.A.

As a young man, Thoren wanted to be a live action filmmaker, but his pivot to animation was because of a haircut.

Continuity matters. The audience can tell if objects are placed differently during a scene. So imagine when a star in one of his college films decided one weekend to shave her head — it drove him up the wall, and into the medium where every piece is hand-curated under the team's control.

"The only boundaries to

animation is your imagination," Thoren said.

Every film produced by Wonder Media Studio embeds a positive message by design.

Animation can be used for numerous purposes, Thoren said, so "why can't we use animation to model good behavior?"

### Fundraiser

Kimberlee Spaetig-Peterson's class at Riverview are fundraising to cover travel costs to see the world premiere of "The WonderGrove Wizard of Oz" and attend a national conference on animation.

They're asking for \$30,000. The link is on [www.GoFundMe.com](http://www.GoFundMe.com): [www.gofundme.com/the-road-to-oz](http://www.gofundme.com/the-road-to-oz)