

Elementary School Students Enjoy Beech Tree Puppets

by Anne Gardner

The library at Greenbelt Elementary School (GES) was transformed last week into a puppet theater, with each grade in turn treated to a tale of enchantments, dragons, giants, handsome princes and captured princesses. Local Greenbelt couple Ingrid Cowan and Ole Hass had received a grant from Greenbelt's Advisory Committee on Education (ACE) to fund the puppet shows and gave seven performances over three days, each to an audience of 50 to 100 children.

The couple spent the past year handcrafting the intricate 20" marionette puppets from a combination of wood, paper mache and silk. They also used shadow puppets very effectively in one scene to depict a battle between the prince and the dragon.

The multi-talented couple are trained opera singers and actors. They wrote the script based on Grimm's fairy tale "The Crystal Ball" and then incorporated song and several musical instruments, including an In-



Ingrid Cowan and Ole Hass delight the young audiences with their handmade puppets.

ing at the clumsy giants and exclaiming as the magician's castle was revealed.

At the end of each performance the students had the opportunity to ask questions. These consisted mostly of excited comments from the younger audience members about how much they had enjoyed the show but the older students asked how the puppets were made, what the unusual musical instruments were and details about the characters in the story.

Students took away with them the values of courage, steadfastness, love for truth and the need to take on responsibility in the world, all of which were expressed in the fairy tale. Perhaps also they will be inspired to greater creativity and imagination after being exposed to Cowan and Hass's talents. The couple hopes to take their "Beech Tree Puppet Theatre" shows to other local schools and organizations in the future and to share their love of music and theater with a wider audience.

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dian flute and a lyre, to weave their delightful magic. From the smallest pre-kindergarten students to the biggest fifth graders, the students were mesmerized, laugh-