

Guardian Angels

Throughout the course of the year, a representative from the Guardian Angels has come and spoken to us on several occasions. When John Munro came again to talk to the seventh graders during their science classes and have them do skits on real life situations, we decided to interview him and find out a little bit more about him and the Guardian Angels.

Enrichment Staff: What exactly do you do?

John Munro: I am an education director for Guardian Angels. I visit schools in the tri-state area to talk about strategies for students and teachers to create bully-free and safe schools. I deal with issues like tolerance, acceptance and how to create an atmosphere of non-violence and civility. I give assemblies and small group follow-ups where students create skits (empathy raising scenarios that kids can relate to). "The real answer to bullying is kids sticking up for kids"

ES: How were the Guardian Angels formed? Who formed them?

JM: Curtis Sliwa formed The Guardian Angels in 1979 as an organization dedicated to protecting normal people from street crime. Over the years the Guardian Angels evolved into an organization that provided programs for safety and well being for students and staff at schools. I knew about the Guardian Angels when I was growing up and about the bravery and integrity of Curtis Sliwa, but back then the Guardian Angels only tried to prevent street crime and didn't go and visit schools.

ES: When did you get started with the Guardian Angels?

JM: Two years ago I left teaching to join the Guardian Angels.

ES: You were a teacher?

JM: Yes. I was a middle school and high school teacher for thirty-five years. I taught character education and anti-bullying. I saw lots of bullying situations during my time as a teacher? ES: What are your goals as a Guardian Angel?

JM: My goal is to make sure that schools are as safe and bully free as possible, that civility and kindness is at the highest it can be, and to show kids it isn't their fault if they're being bullied. I also try to let kids know that they are not powerless and that they can report cruelty without the fear of being bullied themselves or being bullied even more.

ES: Do you enjoy doing it?

JM: I love what I am doing because I know bullying is the number one problem that kids face. 160,000 kids skip school each day because of bullying. I really enjoy being able to help kids get through their days smiling.

ES: Who or what was your inspiration?

JM: After thirty-five years in education I have seen tons of cruelty among kids. I have always tried to prevent emotional harm in and out of school. I also have three daughters of my own and I want there to be safe schools for them and everyone.

ES: What do you wish to accomplish when you come to schools like ours?

JM: I go back to schools five to six times a year to remind kids about what we talked about. I think that the follow-ups in schools are much more effective than just coming and then leaving. Bernardsville is dedicated to promoting emotional and social well-being. The kids here are really friendly and open in sharing concerns and joys which is a really great thing. But even the great school systems, like Bernardsville's, can be even greater when they are as safe and bully-free as possible.

ES: When you were a teenager did you see yourself doing this? Or was this something that you became interested more recently?

JM: I never saw myself as a Guardian Angel but life is full of twists and turns. I originally wanted to be an officer in the Air Force but that didn't work out and I became a teacher instead. I taught grade eleven and coached football at Bergen Catholic High School and am currently an assistant professor at St. Peter's College and the vice president of the Board of Education in Harrington Park, New Jersey.

ES: Thank you for taking the time to let us talk to you about the Guardian Angels.

JM: No problem. I would also like to thank the entire staff, the teachers, Dr. Kratz, Mr. Lott and specifically the terrific students of Bernardsville Middle School for their kindness to me.