



Photo by Lillian Cox

Joseph Jordan (left) and Matt Green, seventh-graders at Vista Magnet Middle School, show off the tennis shoes they painted for children in Morocco.

Students send message through shoes

By Lillian Cox, Today Local News

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VISTA — “It makes me feel that I am part of the world and that I’m not just taking up space,” seventh-grader Justin Villalobos said as he applied blue and green paint to the canvas of a white tennis shoe.

Justin is a Peace Paint Ambassador in the Art Miles Mural Project’s Shoes of Hope program. He was among 400 students at Vista Magnet Middle School who produced 200 brightly painted pairs of tennis shoes for children in Morocco.

The Art Miles Mural Project (AMMP) was conceived in 1996 by Oceanside residents Fouad Tawfilis and his wife, Joanne, a former United Nations executive. The goal was to promote peace and cultural understanding by producing 12 themed murals to be displayed at art shows worldwide and eventually be wrapped around the Egyptian pyramids.

Online

the-art-miles-mural-project.org

The shoe project started in 2005 when AMMP collaborated with San Diego’s International High School to paint canvas shoes that were donated to Uganda’s disarmed child soldiers. Since the official launch of the project in 2006, approximately 5,000 pairs of shoes have been shipped to

refugee centers, orphanages and schools in Uganda, South Africa, Namibia and Ghana. Each pair included a hand-written message of hope.

Jennifer Eckle, a seventh-grade math teacher, coordinates community service projects at Vista Magnet Middle School. She learned about the shoe project on the Internet.

“Since we are an International Baccalaureate school, each student is required to complete three community service projects a year,” she said. “Shoes of Hope connects our students with other parts of the world and gives them the satisfaction of giving something back.”

Eventually, Eckle said, she would like to combine the shoe project with Trekking for Kids, a nonprofit group that organizes hikes in remote parts of the world to raise funds for orphanages.

Principal Jose Manuel Villarreal said activities such as the shoe project provide students with an opportunity to learn about teamwork while contributing to the world.

“It is not about perfection,” he said, “It’s about the message kids are sending to other countries.”

Shoes of Hope have been painted in Japan, Korea, Canada and the United States.

“In mid-January, celebrities will be painting shoes and auctioning them off at the Sundance Film Festival,” said Laurie G. Brooks of the Art Miles Mural Project.

Lillian Cox is a freelance writer who lives in Encinitas.