

Mt. Vernon class buys statue to honor Vietnam war dog

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by Bob Kemerer

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Trudy DeBolt's sixth-grade class raised money to buy this German Shepard fountain. The dog was purchased in memory of Ed Reeves' scout dog in the Vietnam War. (WSYX/WTTE)

MT. VERNON, Ohio (WSYX/WTTE) — Trudy DeBolt's sixth grade class at Mt. Vernon Middle School has clearly gone to the dogs.

Stuffed dogs, dog photos and dog books coat the walls and cram the shelves in a room crazy for canines.

It's just one way the effervescent DeBolt commands her class' attention. She thinks including dogs in their learning keeps the kids "emotionally invested".

"With dogs, every student, for the most part, can relate," DeBolt said.

And nothing gets the kids' tails wagging quite like the book 'Cracker! The best dog in Vietnam', by author Cynthia Kadohata.

"We start the year from reading Cracker, because it's about a German Shepherd that a boy owned and was donated to there military for the Vietnam War. What's amazing is that because of Cracker that leads us in a WAGS program I started," DeBolt said.

'WAGS' stands for 'Working Dog Awareness Group'. Each Saturday, a

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couple dozen of DeBolt's kids read to the dogs at the Knox County Animal Shelter.

Debolt said they do it, in part, to honor war dogs, like Cracker.

"When we got done with the book we found out that even though 4,000 dogs served in the Vietnam War, only 204 actually came back to the United States. We knew that we couldn't change the fate of those dogs in the Vietnam war, but maybe we could do something for the dogs right here in our community. We want to make sure these dogs never give up. We want them always to have hope. So we go every single week and read to them," DeBolt said.

For several years now, Cracker has come to life when former Vietnam Scout Dog handler Ed Reeves comes to talk to the class about his experiences with his dog 'Prince'.

"He's able to come here and brings the realistic part of what war dogs did in Vietnam to the kids. It helps them show that even though Cracker is a historical fiction book, it is completely real as far as the events that we read about," DeBolt said.

For more on Reeves' story and a new memorial to the War Dogs that he helped spearhead, [click here](#).



On a recent visit, Debolt and her kids had a big surprise for Ed.

First, a little back story.

In the spring, Mt. Vernon will unveil a whimsical downtown fountain, which will spray water from the mouths of dog statues. Each statue was available to name, for \$15,000.

Organizers approached Debolt, who immediately told them that price was too steep for her young fundraisers. But, she promised \$2,000.

They actually raised \$2,600 in just three weeks.

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Along with matching dollars from local charitable groups, Debolt's class now had the required \$15,000 and promptly named the fountain's German Shepherd, 'Prince 986A'.

In December, after Ed had spoken to a packed house in the school library, Debolt surprised him with the news that this unique fountain would be guarded by his beloved 'Prince'.

He broke down, hugging her and telling her "you've outdone yourself this time!"

Then, she took him to meet the sculpture, from which water will flow starting this spring. Both of them choked up as the cover came off 'Prince'.

It clearly means the world to Debolt, who says, "every day before school, I make sure I drive by every morning., and I have my moment with him."

A combination of canines and a 'can-do' class means Trudy Debolt and Ed Reeves have given the kids a dog they can call their own forever.

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