

Westwood says goodbye to sixth-graders

6.3.04

Melissa Gray stepped to the microphone at Westwood Elementary School's sixth-grade graduation Thursday and began reciting the Gettysburg Address. The graduates seated in rows to Gray's right told the sixth-grade teacher she was reading the wrong speech.

Undeterred, Gray flipped forward in her legal pad and declaimed: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country."

The graduates interrupted Gray again, telling her John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address was the wrong speech.

Gray turned a few more yellow pages and then announced: "We are here today to celebrate the accomplishments of these dazzling young people facing you. This group of students is filled with intelligent and enterprising young minds, talented athletes, gifted musicians, skillful artists and kind, generous, human beings."

Looking directly at the audience Gray delivered the punch line: "Some of you out there are thinking 'That girl still has the wrong speech.' "

The ceremony that followed Gray's welcome highlighted the accomplishments of the 81-member graduating class. The dazzling young people in the Student Council helped the school raise \$1,000 for the ARISE program, which provides adult support for students with disabilities participating in after-school activities. Kind, generous sixth-graders gathered contributions for Toy for Tots and the Catholic Charities Food Shelf.

Enterprising young minds enjoyed success in Future Problem Solving, Word Masters, Academic Triathlon and Speak Up! Gifted musicians made joyful noise in Band and Orchestra. Skillful artists exhibited their works in the school's hallways.

Talented athletes like Grace Agbor and John Briese earned ribbons at the May 19 Field Day. Briese's 177-foot softball toss was good for first place in a meet that featured 400 District 742 sixth-graders.

Throw in Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance No. 1," a slide show filled with photos of students, juice and cookies, presents and praise for the teachers, and Westwood's 2004 Sixth Grade Graduation was a smashing success.

The school's classroom teachers are Michaelene Lucia, Brenda Schneider and Melissa Gray. Gray's humorous welcome concluded on a more serious note: "Today we celebrate an ending and we celebrate a beginning . . . We will miss your smiles, your laughter, your kindness."