

HERRY VALLEY

at 815-987-1350 or local@rrstar.com

JACKSON RENOVATIONS | VOLUNTEERS SPRUCE UP CLASSROOMS



AMY J. VAN HORN | ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

Nicole Blum on Thursday uses bright colors to paint numbers that will hang on the wall of a second-grade classroom that volunteers are renovating at Jackson Elementary.

'We want kids to feel this is the greatest place to be'

By Jeff Kolkey

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

ROCKFORD — Volunteers are making a difference in Rockford schools this spring break, and they aren't afraid to get dirty and spend thousands of dollars to do it.

Heartland Community Church grabbed some headlines recently by marshaling 1,600 volunteers who raised \$150,000 to renovate three Rockford schools this week.

At the same time, a smaller group of volunteers has worked quietly on two classrooms at Jackson Elementary School.

About 40 volunteers led by 43-year-old children's book author, public speaker and real estate executive Saul Serna are working to transform two second-grade classrooms.

"We are not talking about what we should do. We are doing it," Serna said. "This isn't about painting walls. It's about a transformation. We want kids to feel this is the greatest place to be. We want the rooms to be exciting, clean and inspiring."

Jackson Elementary classroom renovation

A pair of second-grade classrooms at Jackson are getting some much-needed fixes this spring break courtesy of volunteers organized by children's book author Saul Serna and his wife, Century 21 Country North President Jan Mansfield. Here is a look at the project by the numbers:

103 years: Age of Jackson Elementary

70: New chairs bought for classrooms

\$15,000: Spent on furniture and paint

12: New bookshelves bought for the classrooms

19: Gallons of bright red, green, yellow and orange paint used

cost them about \$15,000 so far in addition to donated materials.

Volunteers are coming from businesses owned by

On the Web

See more pictures online. Go to rrstar.com and click on this story for a link.

of a community.

It's a 12-week children's "life-coaching" program that includes stickers as students keep track of their accomplishments like learning patience, being appreciative and being grateful. It's in both English and Spanish.

Superintendent Dennis Thompson said the volunteer efforts are desperately needed as the School District struggles with a \$14.6 million deficit in its maintenance budget. Although the district is posting surpluses in its education fund — the main operating fund used to pay teachers — the maintenance fund continues to suffer.

Thompson said the district does what it can with available funds, but there are millions of dollars' worth of unfulfilled maintenance needs in Rockford schools each year.