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# Portsmouth Herald



Author and speaker Ed Gerety captivates students at Portsmouth Middle School during his presentation yesterday.

*Staff Photo by Ryan Mercer*

Wednesday, December 8, 1999

## Character counts

By **Karen Dandurant**, Portsmouth Herald Staff Writer

PORTSMOUTH - Appreciation, respect, kindness and belief in themselves and in others was the message Ed Gerety delivered to sixth-grade students at Portsmouth Middle School. He delivered his message through humor and by using stories about real people and events.

Gerety's messages were simple, ones the kids have heard throughout their lives, but they said they received his message, because it was fun to listen to.

"He did say things other people say," said Kayla Lawry. "He said it differently though. He said it so we could relate and feel what he was trying to get across to us. He was fun."

"Like the thing about smiling at people," said Rachel Sacks. "I really never gave it much thought, but I can see now how making an effort to smile at people will make things better."

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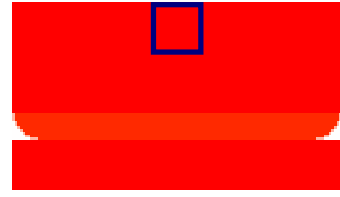
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"We all have the ability and the power to reach out and make a difference," said Gerety. He said there were three simple words that always made a difference. Picking one boy, Gerety said "Hey Joey ... I love you."



As the kids laughed, and Joey blushed, Gerety explained the importance of not losing the ability to say those words.

Gerety asked the sixth-graders to raise their hands if they had never seen or never heard another kid being picked on.

Not a hand in the room went up. Think about that, said Gerety.

He told a story about putting tacks on a little girl's chair when he was in third grade, after being dared to by his "friends." After a long story that had the class riveted, Gerety added the message. Because he caused that little girl pain and embarrassment, he said she will never forget the incident. And, because a teacher pointed out the consequences of his actions to him, and because those "friends" all pointed the finger at him, he also never forgot.

The next time a test of his character arose, Gerety said it helped give him the power to resist.

"Words and actions can either tear a person down, or help build them up," said Gerety.

Gerety spoke a lot about actions, about good and bad choices. The impacts of each were explored and absorbed as the students listened to him talk, and watched him climb chairs, run through their ranks, jump up and down, do karate noises \_ anything to illustrate his words. They eagerly mimicked his actions whenever they were asked.

"Every choice you make brings you closer to, or farther away from your dreams," said Gerety. "You have the power to decide."

Taking the time to appreciate those around you, and the time you have to spend with the people you love, struck a chord with Sarita Okhuysen. She said her dad works a lot, so she really doesn't see too much of him.

Sarita said Gerety taught her to try and make that time she does have with her dad special.

After his talk, Gerety did a "pop" quiz, to gauge what the kids had gotten from his message. Eager to show they understood, the students delivered back to Gerety all of his messages of respect, appreciation, kindness and of belief in themselves.

One boy even offered an offhand bit of wisdom. "Never put tacks in someone's chair," he said.

Gerety has been delivering his messages to schools, parent groups and the community since 1992. He started doing it when he was a freshman at the University of New Hampshire, from which he holds a degree in communications.

The Portsmouth resident runs Gerety Presentations based here in the city. Anyone interested in learning more can contact him through his Web site at [www.geretypresentations.com](http://www.geretypresentations.com), or by phone at (800) 207-2580.

"I want to see kids do random acts of kindness, everywhere they can," said Gerety. "Each act can change the world."

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