

Carpeting the United Nations

Contributed by Carol DeMicco Pobanz – a representative of UPF

A group of students crowd around the computer screen in the Nutley High School art room, introducing themselves to their student counterparts in Honduras, Central America. This group of students is working on a cooperative design for the second sawdust tapestry being executed by the Nutley High School in cooperation with Honduras.

Two years ago, Honduran and Nutley art students engaged in a cultural exchange project, Pathways to Peace – the making of a traditional sawdust carpet on Franklin Avenue, in front of the Junior High School. Sawdust carpets are traditionally created to greet a religious procession that walks over them. The tradition of decorating streets in this fashion began in Europe and was brought to the Americas by the Spanish. The custom is still found in Mexico, Central America, and some localities of South America.

The carpets are traditionally a colorful expression of religious fervor. Groups of individuals often plan their designs months ahead, as well as dye the sawdust and prepare their other materials. Then they work in cooperation throughout the night to prepare these beautiful carpets to adorn the streets to finally become the ceremonial offering to receive the religious processions on Good Friday.

In Honduras, the making of sawdust carpets is traditionally carried out around Easter time and has made the city of Comayagua Honduras' main tourist attraction during the Easter season. Carpets are also created throughout the streets of the cities of Copan, Tegucigalpa, Danlí and Santa Barbara.

In 2015, the first tapestry project was a cooperative endeavor between the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) of the USA and of Honduras, together with the Municipality of Nutley and the Nutley High School art department. The keynote speaker at that event was Ambassador Mary Elizabeth Flores Flake, the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations. Recently, Ambassador Flores asked that the same group replicate the event at the United Nations in celebration of the UN 73rd anniversary.

Unfortunately, the Honduran students were unable to receive the needed visa to travel to the US at this time, but those students are still contributing virtually through cell phones and computers. "The students have shared designs via Google Documents," explains Theresa Lappastato, art teacher at Nutley High. "This is a very talented and inspired group of young people," she assures us, "who have researched history, designs and the special techniques for making the carpets. Then, after sharing the designs with one another, a collaborative drawing has been created reflecting a worldwide hope for peace, as well as an expression of the friendship and cooperation of the participants."

"This is an opportunity for students to create goodness together," says Mario Salinas, Honduran director of the Universal Peace Federation. "At the same time, they are learning firsthand about a culture different than their own. As we enter into the age of greater globalization, it is important for the next generation to not only learn teamwork by working alongside one another, but also how to design, plan and put ideas together beyond language, and culture." Ambassador Flores, an artist herself, has also contributed her suggestions for the design, and she has invited all UN Permanent and Deputy Representatives to join her in a celebration of United Nations Day with the inauguration of the carpet. We are all looking forward to working together at the United Nations Plaza on Monday, October 23, to execute this project.