



# Branches on the Vine

JUNE 14 - 20, 2025

## DERBY SCHOOL SHOWCASES COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

- Story by Karen A. Avitabile



Fourth graders Darius, Liam and Delia, left to right, show off displays about Germany they worked on for a schoolwide project, Around the World, sponsored by St. Mary-St. Michael School in Derby.  
PHOTO BY KAREN A. AVITABILE

Students from St. Mary-St. Michael School in Derby took part in a first-time, hands-on “Around the World” project to learn more about different countries.

Each grade chose a country and learned about its geography, history, holidays, traditions, food, fashion, landmarks, language, sports, music, religion and so much more.

“Everybody did something different,” says Toni Ann LaMattina, principal of St. Mary-St. Michael School. “I gave them free rein.”

Some of the featured countries included Germany, Guatemala, Italy, Japan and Poland.

“This was an opportunity for the students to show off their work,” LaMattina says. “We never had a themed activity. This was a new thing.”

To showcase their country, each classroom wrote reports, decorated bulletin boards, created flags and gave presentations during an evening open house. A few multicultural dishes were prepared for guests to enjoy.

“In my first year as principal, it was so amazing to see the students show off their hard work that they completed in class,” LaMattina says.

“They were smiling from ear to ear, showing their parents and they were so welcoming to the new families that came in for a tour of our school.”

The eighth grade class focused on Italy. One student studied a particular city in the country. “I learned a lot about the history of Basilicata, Italy,” says student Shenaye. “It is very historical. I feel history builds our future.”

Guatemala was the class project selected by sixth graders. The students focused on the significance of the country, its geography, renowned landmarks and the country’s flag.

The three-panel, vertical flag is adorned by blue stripes on the left and right sides, which represent the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The white stripe in the center represents peace and highlights the coat of arms shield of Guatemala, adopted after the 1871 Liberal Revolution.

Zarah says she enjoyed writing about Guatemala’s flag. “I learned about the stripes,” she says.

Fourth graders chose Germany for their country. Matias wrote about the history of the Berlin Wall. “I chose the Berlin Wall because back then, Germany was divided and East Germany built it to stop the people crossing the border,”

Around the World culminated with an evening open house. Parents, guests and new families to the school were invited to see the work by the students.

“The event was a great success,” LaMattina says. “We had many school families along with a handful of new families. I received much positive feedback from this event, and I plan to continue with it each year and change up the theme.”

The day after the open house, the principal recalls students asking her if they can do the project again next year “which showed that it was all worth it.”

The teachers enjoyed Around the World too, LaMattina says. “Not only did the students enjoy this project, but the teachers did as well.”

he wrote in an essay. “Today, you can still go there. Now it’s possible to pass the city with no worries.”

For Delia, she says learning some German words was a lot of fun. She adds she was surprised that hamburgers and pretzels are popular foods among German residents.



# Upcoming Events



06/22 SUNDAY 12:15PM  
**CORPUS CHRISTI PROCESSION**  
SS. Isidore and Maria Parish at St. Paul  
Church, 2577 Main St, Glastonbury

Experience the magnificence and grandeur of the Third Annual Glastonbury Eucharistic Procession on the Feast of Corpus Christi. Bring your family, friends, and neighbors and join us as we go forth from St. Paul Church, bringing Christ into our streets and witnessing to our faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Reception to follow.



06/25 WEDNESDAY 7PM  
**FREE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES**  
Holy Family Retreat Center, 303 Tunxis Rd,  
West Hartford

The grounds of Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center will again resonate with the sound of music this summer. Gather your family and friends, grab a blanket or low-profile beach chair, and make your way to our pavilion for this lively concert series. You are welcome to bring food and beverages to enjoy throughout the evening. Our grounds are magnificent, so come early to enjoy our walking paths or recenter yourself with a journey through our labyrinth.

An evening of classical music's greatest hits with a few surprises. Featuring David Kramer (cello), Virginia Kramer (violin), Lu Sun (viola), and John Kramer (violin), all members of Holy Family's music ministry.

These concerts are **FREE** to attend. No registration required.

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