



Gazette photo by Daniel Cooney

*Daniel Gallagher, 5, works on a design for a rainforest card at the Homestead school.*

## Homestead kids' art saves rainforest

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**GLEN SPEY** — Saving a rainforest may be the chic thing to do these days, but it wasn't so much so three years ago when kids at the Homestead School began doing it.

Since then, students at the Montessori-method school on Hollow Road have banked \$2,900 from various fundraising projects to benefit the California-based Ecosystem Survival Plan and Nature Conservancy purchases of rainforest in the Rio Bravo Conservation Area in Belize. Belize is located at the base of the Yucatan Peninsula.

So how do 80, 5-6- and -7 year-olds go about financing 58 acres in Central America and impacting the world environment? They lean on the crayola markers and they bug their parents, of course.

With the support of their parents, the kids have been raising money through art sales for two years.

"Homestead Kids Save the Rainforest," will be inscribed on the golden seals of packets of notecards soon to be appearing in the homes of Homestead School parents. The cards, featuring student designs of tropical plants in forest colors, are the latest product from the art classes taught by school co-director Marsha Lust Comstock.

She is also a professional potter and painter, who donates income from her work. She says the kids' interest in the rainforest program is a valuable teaching aid. The cards tropical plants, mostly orchids, are not imaginary, but student copies from the works of 19th

and 20th century artists in the collection of the Bronx Botanical Gardens.

The cards are the last and most sophisticated effort of the student artists. The first was an 18x24 poster print done in 1991, featuring students' depictions of jungle wildlife. At \$8, \$10 for crayola coloring; it bought their first 17 acres.

And what is an acre? Students flagged acreage on school property to visualize the scale and recorded the fact in a 1992 birthday calendar, the last of the big fundraisers. "I want to save the rain forest because I want to discover things in the rain forest when I grow up," the calendar quoted student Sarah Reynolds.

Co-director Peter Comstock says parents tell him they're impressed how the rainforest stays with the kids from year to year. He said the rainforests may well become a new generation's symbol, much like Smokey the Bear was when he was a child. "Its ingrained. I'll suppose I'll be automatically kicking out any fire in the woods as long as live," he said.

Homestead's efforts have not gone unheeded. Director Norman Gershenz of the Ecosystem Survival Plan recently wrote to Marsha of his appreciation for "all your hard work," and his handwritten note details program successes but he admits, "All this pales in relationship to how excited I become seeing our success through the children around the country."

Homestead's notecard sales could help prevent that. If their printing of 500 sets sells at \$6 each, the students will have reached a goal of preserving 100 acres of forest canopy.