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## Learning Their Please and Thank Yous

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Marissa Mills of Groton City may be a certified etiquette consultant, but that doesn't mean she wears white gloves or cooks gourmet meals for her family every night.

"People are often surprised, but there are times we'll eat off paper plates at home," she said.

Mills, a mother to four children, was recently invited to teach etiquette to kindergarteners at The Friendship School in Waterford and hoped to show that good manners are not unachievable.

"Etiquette does not have to mean being pretentious and putting on airs," she said, "It's about civility."

The students were taught five lessons in Jo-Ann Del Grosso's kindergarten class about topics such as eye contact, sharing, polite words and phrases, and table manners.

"The whole idea behind the program is to give them little building blocks for the future," Mills said.

Mills, who was certified by the Washington School of Protocol, hopes that the students will be able to expand upon these basic skills later on in life, whether it is at a business dinner or job interviews.

"My goal for this program is to give them self-confidence," Mills said.

Since she started her company, Mills Etiquette Services, two years ago, Mills has taught people ranging from 4 to 64 years old.

"The thing is, I enjoy teaching children because they're not tainted yet," she said.

Children were a major reason Mills began studying etiquette 10 years ago.

"I just noticed that the disrespect among youth was rampant," she said.

One example Mills took note of was recent news about the Northwestern University's national championship women's lacrosse team's visit to the White House, when several players wore flip-flop sandals in a photo with President Bush.

Mills said she recognizes that many busy parents no longer have the time to sit around a dinner table, imparting basic etiquette skills.

Mills, who learned many of her own good habits from her mother when growing up in West Virginia, hopes to assist many of these working families.

"If there are any surprises in this business, it's that children usually like [the lessons] and want more of them, but parents aren't willing necessarily to send their children because they feel like they're not doing their job," Mills said, adding "but they shouldn't feel that way at all."

Del Grosso has witnessed Mills' lessons and said that while the program is new to her, she anticipates positive results.

"It's right at their level, and I think we'll see the fruits of our labor," she said.

Mills' course came as a result of a mini-grant from the New London Education Foundation. Kathy Suprin, director of The Friendship School, was pleased to use the grant and have Mills providing lessons about manners to the youngest of students.

"At this level, you really are developing social skills," she said.

Suprin hoped that the school could offer the program again next year.

"Part of our mission is to encourage nice relationships with others," Suprin said, "and this program does exactly that."

By Rachel Harrington

Times Staff Writer

*Waterford*

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