

# SCHOOLS

## Jones sign affirms 'welcoming' atmosphere

■ *Plaster hands speak to hearing-impaired visitors.*

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Suburban News Publications

A new greeting sign at Jones Middle Schools uses sign language to make hearing-impaired students feel more welcome.

Teachers and Upper Arlington artisan Tim O'Neill worked together to make a plaster and wood sign spelling, "Welcome to Jones," in sign language. It hangs by the office in the school.

"When the (Franklin County Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Program) unit was added to the building, we wanted to make everyone felt comfortable," said Margaret Cloern, art teacher.

"Jones is a welcoming place."

The unit has been at the school for four years now, they said, but students new to the program can benefit from the sign as well as current hearing-impaired students.

Cloern came up with the plaster hands idea, and suggested it to Molly Todd, another art teacher at Jones.

Hands of current Jones students were made in art class for the sign.

"We made an enormous plaster mess and got as many kids involved as we could," said Cloern.

"We weren't sure how to hang them, so we hit a roadblock. That's when Birti took the reins."

American History teacher Birti Hardie heard about the project at a meeting, when Cloern had others ask for help.

"One of my former students (O'Neill) from my first years of teaching owns Reed Arts," Hardie said.

"He came over and we met with Laura



A new sign greets hearing impaired students in the entryway of Jones Middle School. It spells out "Welcome to Jones." Showing off the new sign are (from left): Sandi Peterson, interpreter; Laurie Sutherin, hearing impaired teacher; Tim O'Neill, president of Reed Arts; Margaret Cloern, art teacher; Betsey Eastwood, PTO president, 20008-09; Molly Todd, art teacher; and Pam Shisler, PTO president 2007-08.

Sutherin, the hearing impaired teacher."

Together, they took pictures of Sutherin performing the signs, so O'Neill would know how to hang them. He then handled the task of mounting and framing the hands.

"What a great project," said O'Neill, presi-

dent of Reed Arts. "(Hardie is) a former teacher of mine, and she stopped in and wanted to see if I had any ideas.

"The tricky part was trying to figure out how

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the hands were going to be positioned, to see how that would look from the onlooker's viewpoint. I had an idea to bend steel bars to support the plaster."

O'Neill said the hands are attached to either the back plate or the supporting ledge.

"We worked with some raw lumber and stained it to match the lobby's woodwork," he said. "I think it turned out really well."

His expertise was just what the collaboration needed, said Hardie.

"He welcomed the challenge," she said.

Others at the school got involved, and wrote to the Jones PTO to seek funding for O'Neill's work. The PTO obliged, and the finished product hangs today at the school.

"We're just really proud of it," said Cloern. "It says, 'This is what the world is, include everyone.'"

Hardie agreed.

"We need to be open to new connections," she said.

"Everybody's better for it. Our kids will ask those students what that sign says."