

'Chainsaw Man' saves Elmwood with art

BY JULIE SNYDER
C & G Staff Writer

Ever since city officials came out to Elmwood Elementary School in October and removed three large trees from the front entrance, students, teachers, staff, parents and visitors have had to look at a lonely 11-foot trunk.

That was when the South Lake school's Parent-Teacher Association sprang into action.

Nancy Goodrich, Elmwood Elementary School's PTA board vice president, said the entire school wanted something done to brighten up the front of the school yet again, and at the same time show some school spirit.

After doing a little investigating, Goodrich pitched an idea to school Principal Tim Jalkanen: hire an experienced woodcarver to come out and turn the trunk into a symbol of the school's mascot — an eagle.

Goodrich said she and Jalkanen presented the idea to the PTA — which would be responsible for funding the proposed project — and received staunch support.

"What a great way to show our school spirit than to have a large eagle statue out front," Goodrich said. "The students helped get the project off the ground."

The students were first asked to vote on how they would like to eagle depicted — with wings facing upward or downward. It was an easy 300-90 win for wings up.

Next came the matter of funding.

According to Jalkanen, an anonymous donor provided \$500 toward the effort and the students held a two-week penny drive that brought in an additional \$100.

"We try to get the kids involved as much as possible," Jalkanen said. "They were all very excited about the project."

Then it was time to bring in the woodcarver.

Chesterfield Township resident Emil Szkipala, a native of Romania, studied woodcarving and fine arts before immigrating to the United States in 1991.

While Szkipala holds a diploma as a carpenter and woodcarver, his specialty is building and restoring wood-carved furniture, altars and fireplace mantels.

He didn't get into chainsaw woodcarving until coming to the United States.

"I met a man who did it, and I

thought it would be something I would like to do," he said. "And I found that I was good at it."

In 1993, Szkipala became partners with Kenneth Boshell, who was known as the "Chainsaw Man of Michigan." Together they appeared on various local televi-

sion shows, including "Fox Sports Detroit" after Szkipala completed a 6-foot-tall wooden Stanley Cup, at exhibitions and in parades.

After Boshell's retirement in 1999, Szkipala took over the title of Chainsaw Man of Michigan.

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Photo by Julie Snyder

Chainsaw woodcarver and artist Emil Szkipala completed his wood sculpture of an eagle outside of Elmwood Elementary School last week.

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