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—Ona, 5th grader at Parker School



Tribune photo by Zbigniew Szpak

Allee Struve (from left), Francesca Cedro and Megan Jain of Girl Scouts Troop 646 work on quilt squares.

## Stitching pieces for peace

**Non-profit program helps kids learn about world conflict while creating quilts**

**By Michelle Keller**  
Tribune staff reporter

Bits of colorful fabric flew Friday afternoon at Sister Arts Studio in Lincoln Park as Ona Gleichman, 11, and eight other Girl Scouts each worked to create a fabric square that symbolized peace in a personal way.

The girls were taking part in a larger project coordinated by the Chicago-based non-profit group Genesis at the Crossroads, founded in 1999 by Wendy Sternberg, a professor of medicine at Northwestern University. The goal of the project, named "One Peace at a Time," was to give children a chance to think about world conflict and peace in an artistic way, Sternberg said.

Local artists will use the squares to create mini-quilts, which will be displayed Dec. 10 at the Merchandise Mart's One of a Kind Show and Sale. The quilts will travel to museums of peace and tolerance around the country before Sternberg sends them to children in Iraq through the organization Operation Iraqi Children, a program that sends school supplies to Iraqi children.

Artists participating in the One of a Kind Show also will create squares. Quilts made from those squares will be auctioned at the sale, with the proceeds going to Genesis at the Crossroads. The group receives both public and private funding through individual and corporate donors, as well as funds from the Chicago Foundation for Women and the Illinois Arts Council.

Since the project began in March, Sternberg has worked with more than 350 Chicago-area children, either through community

groups or schools.

She said she hopes children from different ethnic, cultural, religious and geographic backgrounds will learn from each other as they create their art.

For example, at the end of August, Sternberg took the quilting project to a group of refugee children from countries such as Kenya, Lebanon and Somalia through the Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries.

"In a country like the U.S. where it is a melting pot, a lot of parents fear that their kids are going to lose themselves," Sternberg said. "Through projects with Genesis at the Crossroads, personal and cultural identity can be preserved and shared."

For many parents, the group has been a great way to bring up current events with their children in a creative way.

Ann Oehring, 43, whose daughter Emma, 10, is a member of the Lincoln Park

Girl Scouts troop, said she thought the project's goal fell right in line with the Scouts' mission.

"It brings awareness of very pertinent contemporary world issues," Oehring said.

As Ona, a 5th-grader at Parker School, put the finishing touches on her square, she stopped to explain the meaning of her piece.

"I wanted to show peace to the world, with no more war, so everybody could be happy," Ona said of her creation, an American flag with a colorful peace sign in the middle.

"I put the peace sign over the flag to say peace to America."

And how could there be peace in the world?

"We could have peace in the world "if all of us had rights," Ona said. "Like, the motto for America is a free country, and I think it should be a motto for the world."

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