

## Mill Valley kids protest doggy droppings near play yard

By Don Speich, IJ reporter

Indoor plumbing for dogs is an invention crying to be made. Until it is, the eruption of hard-core, grassroots activism among preschoolers at Mill Valley's Old Firehouse School carries with it the sense of inevitability.

Tired of doing quick shuffles to avoid it or stepping in it - and spending precious recess minutes scraping it and washing it off their shoes - the 2- and 3-year-old activists are waging a campaign against dog poop. It culminated yesterday in anti-defecation signs being placed outside the school next to a sidewalk that leads to the school's play yard.

Dogs and children at loggerheads is an unthinkable paradox to many a resident in Mill Valley, where both reign supreme. But, according to children and school officials alike, lines have been crossed, undue advantage has been taken, betrayal is in the air.

Listen to 3-year-old JD, a natural leader and de facto spokesman for his class:

"The problem is the dogs keep pooping on the sidewalk and I don't want them to because we might step in it."

Something had to be done and, yesterday, about a dozen 2- and 3-year-olds marched outside their classroom and made it clear with posters that dog poop was no longer an option.

JD had definite ideas where each should be placed. But, after propping one up against a sidewalk-level school window, and with the encouragement of teachers, he stepped aside as classmates Beth, 2, and Karen, 2, placed theirs in other locations near poop ground zero.

As luck would have it, there was no evidence of poop yesterday.

Kathy Forhan, the school's director, said the problem began about a month and a half ago.

Poop began appearing - first a little, then a lot.

Forhan said it was a problem with particular significance for preschoolers, because "poop on shoes can result in losing a long time that could be spent playing."

Such a consequence no doubt added a sense of urgency to a class meeting held with

teachers Amy Meyer, Laura Morton and Jenny Dragge. Out of the meeting, a campaign was born, but one with a particular inherent obstacle to its success. How to get rid of poop prompted a discussion of preferred methods of doing it, and soon focused on the most common: scooping it up with a plastic bag on your hand.

A big concern, Forhan said, was "Is there a hole in the bag?"

If there is a silver lining to the poop problem, it is that it's accompanied by a bit of fortuitous synchronicity.

At the very time dog poop popped to the top of the class agenda, so, too, did toilet training for at least some in the class, Forhan said.

That, however, could sometimes be lost in translation, she said, when class discussions would drift out of reach with kids chiming in with "it's my poop no, it's your poop."

"We've lost them at this point," she said.

Nonetheless, in a task all the more daunting because the attention span of preschoolers can be a touch ephemeral, it was decided that no-nonsense signs would be made. But what signs? Many were considered. Three made the cut after a class vote.

The overwhelming winner (eight votes): a Disney-like depiction of a dog pooping as he looks over his shoulder, both startled and apologetic, with red "no" lines slicing diagonally through it.

This being preschool, there were no losers, so the second-place poster (four votes) also got the nod. To the degree that abstraction about this subject is possible, it shows a rather blurred outline of a featureless dog in the act of relief.

The third poster was a printed, hard-hitting message: "Pick up your dog's poop!!! Put a plastic bag over your hand and throw it in the garbage!!!"

Beth who was dressed in pink with ribbons in her hair, was asked if she thought dog owners will now know to pick up after their dogs.

"Yes," she said emphatically, and then headed back into the classroom for snack time.

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**'NO POOPING':** Three-year-old JD yesterday sets one of three 'no-pooping' signs in a window next to a sidewalk along side his preschool, the Old Firehouse School, in Mill Valley. The preschoolers have been working on a project to encourage dog owners to clean up after their pets. IJ photo/Erin Lubin