

# 'Seussical' lends whimsy to stage

By Will Bryant

Carrboro Commons staff writer

Walking into Deb Lederer's art classroom at Carrboro Elementary School last week was like entering a portal to another world.

On one side of the room are six large refrigerator boxes, painted on all sides with vibrant scenes of a make-believe world. Next to the scenery, on a table, is a pile of green glittery hats that looks small compared with the enormous face of the cartoon elephant leaning against the wall.

Giant fluorescent papier-mache fish are scattered across the paint-splattered floor, and a large cat in a red-striped hat stands in the corner grinning whisker to whisker.

They're pieces of the world of "Seussical Junior," a musical based on the books of Dr. Seuss. Carrboro Elementary students brought it to life at three performances Thursday and Friday in the school's auditorium.

The plot features classic Dr. Seuss tales that have been read to children for generations, such as "Green Eggs and Ham," "Horton Hears a Who" and "The Cat in the Hat."

About 150 students, mostly fourth and fifth graders, handled the production's singing, dancing, puppeteering, sound, lights and backstage tasks.

"I am excited and a bit nervous at the same time," said cast member Alec Caruana, 10, on the night of the show's opening. "I mean, everyone is going to be watching you."

The production comes at a time when state school boards are cutting back on fine arts programs in public schools because of budget cuts.

Although arts programs in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools have not borne most of the burden of cuts, funding is still tight.

"We hear all the time what we don't have time for and what we don't have money for," Lederer said.

But Lederer, who directed "Seussical Junior" and designed the sets, said the show brought the school together. "Seussical Junior" was in the works



Staff photo by Will Bryant

Above: Carrboro Elementary students rehearse a scene from "Seussical Junior." Below: The papier-mache Cat in the Hat from the play. Students helped backstage as well as performing.

for about six months, Caruana said. Nearly all of the children in the production, Lederer said, came to school early, stayed late and skipped recess to work on the show.

"I think we have learned collaboration is a huge key and that you need to be a team player, work together, listen to each other and know that you have something to offer," Lederer said. "Every single person has some bit of creativity."

Lederer said "Seussical Junior" was about giving kids an outlet for that creativity and getting them interested in the arts.

"Some of these kids, if they didn't have this experience, might not go on to audition for shows in middle school, high school or college," Lederer said. "Now we've got some kids that have got the theater bug in them."

