

# kids

for moms & dads



Kid Talk

Teacher of the Month

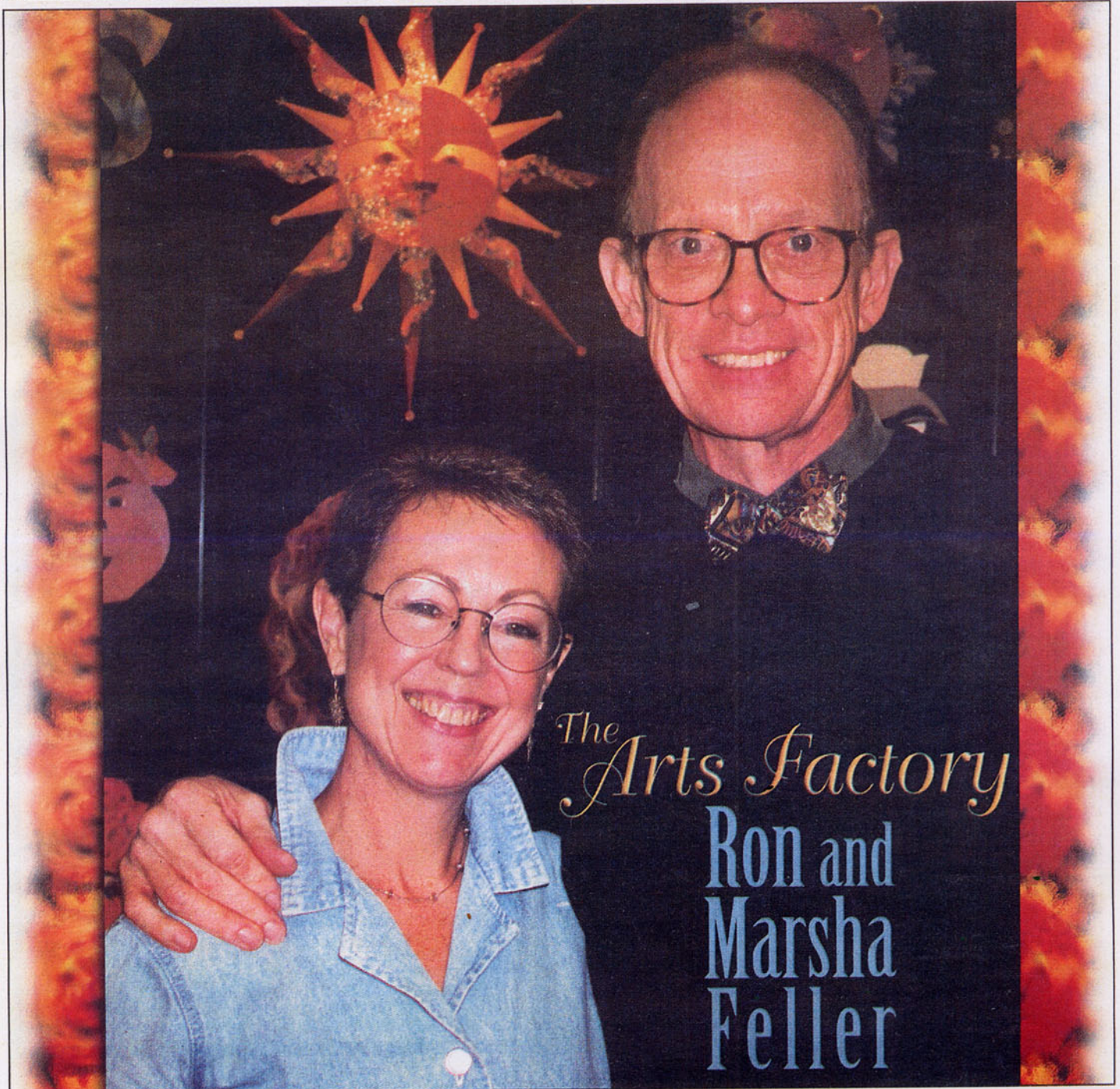
Kids Enviro Page

Kids Gallery

Cool Stuff to Do

November 1999

complimentary issue



*The Arts Factory*

Ron and  
Marsha  
Feller



# Ron and Marsha Feller Spokane's Master Mask Makers

by MaryHelen Flaherty

We're all just right  
Red, brown, tan and white.  
We're all different colors  
We're all just right.  
We all shine in the light  
Red, brown, tan and white.  
We all have eyes, noses, two ears and  
teeth  
Red, brown, tan and white.  
We're all different colors.  
We're all just right!

~ People's Press  
South Pines Elementary

Butterfly masks sparkle with the wink of a child's eye. Faces hide behind dots and swirls of construction paper glued to create magically brilliant creatures. Dangling glittering ribbons flow with the dancing artists parade.

Hours pass in short moments of time. The pied piper may have followed these minstrels who visit our land every Autumn, and stay into the flurry of the first fallen snow. Ron and Marsha Feller have delighted, entertained and captivated our children's imagination for over 35 years.

South Pines Elementary hosted a recent visit. Entering a room filled with the drama of creating, one expects to hear the gentle roar of children in motion. Instead, the artists quietly inspect the project at hand, listen to their mentors for guidance and offer suggestions to others of new found discoveries.

Ron and Marsha Feller combine mask making, music and performing to challenge children of all ages to become involved in the amazing world of art.

This husband/wife team met while attending Central Washington University. Ron's major was music while Marsha excelled in dance and theater. Marsha

commented, "I was academically soul searching after completing my sophomore year. A teacher assured me that if dance was to be a passion, then I should retire from the college experience and perform in summer stock. A suggestion was made to move to a larger city in search of opportunity. I had also been told all my life that teaching should be my profession. I decided to graduate from the university and decide at that point what road I would travel."

Ron loved music and children. "I knew that teaching would be my goal. After graduating from college Ron taught grades five through eight. Marsha began teaching at the elementary level."

While teaching at Lincoln Heights Elementary, Ron became acquainted with students who were residents of Morning Star Boys Ranch. "Marsha and I were invited to dinner at the Ranch, and never left." After an evening with the boys, Marsha and Ron agreed to host Monday night sing-a-longs. The make-shift choir began performing Christmas programs, and have continued the yearly tradition for 34 years. Marsha also directed the summer school program while Ron taught photography, music and counseled the students. The boys continue to explore mask making with Ron and Marsha. "Every summer we design new project ideas. The boys assist in produc-



tion and excel in critiquing."

The Fellers loved teaching and found that they could best utilize their talents by performing for children. They were natural story tellers, focusing on American folk stories and music. The

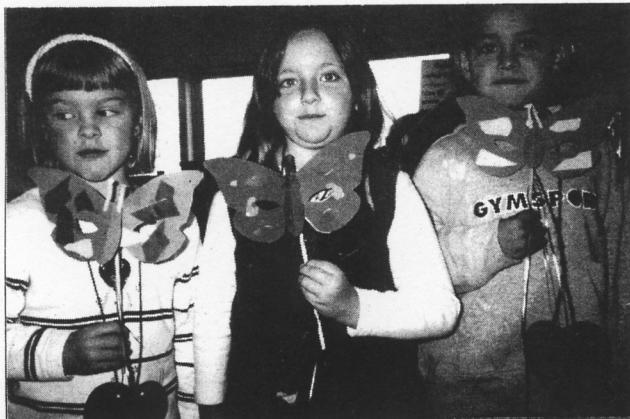
residence program allowed us to be part of a school for two weeks."

The Fellers use masks in their story telling. Marsha smiled, "We find that schools have a surplus of construction paper. Children become the artists; stories evolve as they create the characters." Ron added, "After the masks take life, we assist children in developing a musical story surrounding their character." The Fellers explain, "art inspires art, so once the mask is complete it becomes a spring board for song writing."

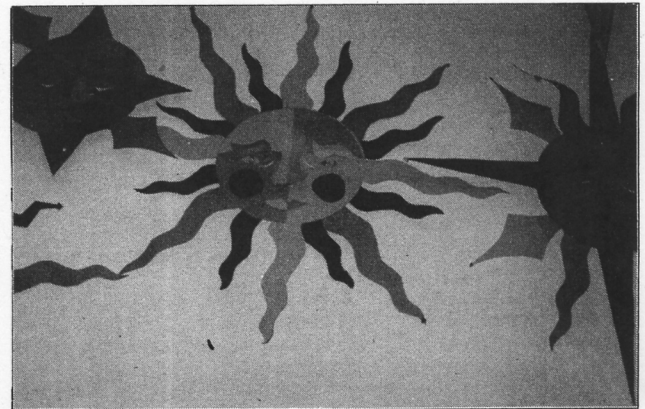
After the song has been performed the children draw, color and paint beautiful books displaying the mask and the song. The books are beautifully etched with stitching, decorated with bright-colored beads, and gently secured with hand-made fasteners.

Marsha explains her theory of art in education, "When a child becomes involved in art, the experience allows them an opportunity to explore the world outside themselves. It is a quiet, passionate piece of time." Teachers and parents know that art is not simply a program of enrichment, it is a necessary ingredient for their education.

Early morning hours, before the first school bell rings, Marsha and Ron offer teachers suggestions to assimilate the arts into their everyday teaching. Geometric



Students from "South Pines Elementary display their masks.



National School Assemblies invited them to travel to different parts of the country and perform for students. After surviving a schedule of 450 performances a year, the Fellers realized that severe burnout may be in their future. "We joined forces with the Washington State Arts Commission. A cultural enrichment program provided live performances for all children in the state. An artists in

designs fashion creatures that may explain mathematical equations. A study of Native American masks offers insight for a social studies program.

Art inspires art, and the Fellers; they inspire and delight the creative genius that lives in our children's souls.