

## **Nationally recognized singer-songwriter visits Valley for some musical education**

By Brian M. Boyce, The Tribune-Star

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TERRE HAUTE — “You’re not tired, are you?” Randy Beard asked a room full of fifth graders at 1:35 p.m.

“Nooooooooo!” they howled back in unison.

A nationally recognized singer-songwriter, Beard returned to Terre Haute for a double-header Tuesday, conducting lessons on literacy through lyrics at Deming Elementary School in the afternoon and again in the evening as part of the school’s Title 1 Parent Night.

Beard noted during the afternoon program that he was venturing into his second decade of working with school children, and fifth-grade teacher Becky Wiesneth, as she sat with her class, recalled the artist playing at her school when she attended Rio Grande Elementary.

Beard, a former elementary school teacher and basketball coach, travels the country as a speaker and educational consultant, teaching through the prism of “learning through lyrical literacy.”

Armed with an acoustic guitar, keyboard and impromptu rhyming skills any rapper would envy, Beard took the students’ essays and poems and led them in song.

Students jumped to microphones singing phrases such as “I’ve got better things to do than drugs” and “onomatopoeia.” Onomatopoeia is a term that refers to words that are spoken how they sound, such as “screech” and “woof.”

Beard alternated between scary ghost voices and his chipmunk impersonation as the students mixed into the language lesson set to music.

“Fifth grade is a very special age for me because it’s the first time I started playing music in a band,” he told the students, guitar in hand.

Deming Elementary Principal Susan Mardis said she’s been involved with Beard’s work many times in the decades he’s performed and noted he’s still “wowing” the students.

Mardis referred to Deming Elementary School’s fifth-graders as “school leaders.”

“They’re just awesome kids,” she said of the 48 students lining the floor as Beard converted essays into song. As they left, Mardis reminded them of Tuesday night’s Title 1 Parent Night where Beard would perform again.

Title 1 is a program funded by the federal government that targets schools in low-income

areas, such as Deming Elementary, and the at-risk children who attend.

Teacher Travis Turpen said Tuesday was his first experience with Beard, who drew the teachers into the songs by name for purposes that seemed as random as the rhymes. “Pretty amazing,” he said of Beard, adding that the creative use of language and lyrics is a plus for the kids.

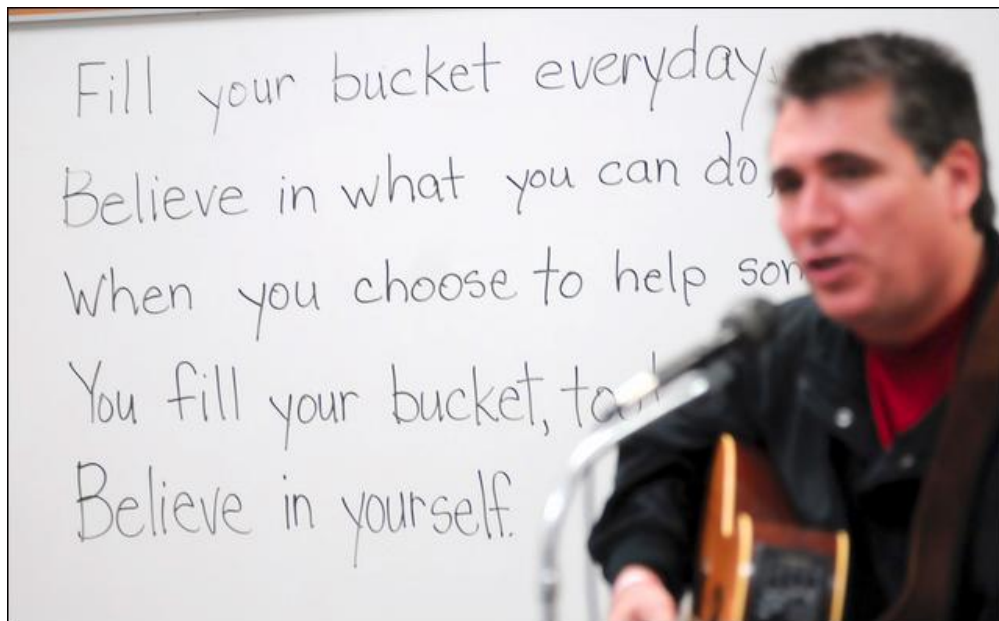


Six-string sing-along: Musician Randy Beard sings lyrics written by Deming Elementary fifth-graders as some of them (in background) sing as backup singers Tuesday at the school.

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Sound effects artist: Deming Elementary School fifth-grader Stephanie Williams contributed her own howling wolf sound as she sings along with her classmates and guest musician Randy Beard Tuesday at the school.

**JOSEPH C. GARZA / The Tribune-Star**



A bucket-filling school: Randy Beard puts the lyrics about filling one's bucket with positive things to song Tuesday at Deming Elementary School.

**JOSEPH C. GARZA / The Tribune-Star**



Audience participation: Guest musician Randy Beard sings along with a group of Deming Elementary students as they create their own version of "I have better things to do than do drugs" which was written by fellow student Summer Dickens, right who is holding the lyrics for Beard to sing Tuesday at the school.

**JOSEPH C. GARZA / The Tribune-Star**



Now were jammin': Guest musical educator Randy Beard encourages Deming Elementary School fifth-grader Ian McClelland to keep up the great work on the piano as he puts the essay, "I have better things to do than do drugs," to song Tuesday at the school. The poem was written by fellow student Summer Dickens.

**JOSEPH C. GARZA / The Tribune-Star**



Onomatopoeia: Deming Elementary School fifth-grader Valleri Strange offers her own word for the song, "Onomatopoeia," as Principal Susan Mardis holds the microphone Tuesday at the school. The song was sang by musical educator Randy Beard.

**JOSEPH C. GARZA / The Tribune-Star**