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Creekside kindergartners make suggestions to Tulsa tornado tower

By Anna Taylor

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When Creekside Elementary School kindergarten teacher Pat Milby learned a friend from high school was involved with a concept for a tornado-shaped building in downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma, she decided to reach out and get her students involved.

Milby's brother, Bob Burris, sent her a text message on March 14 with a picture of a newspaper article from her hometown in Russellville, Arkansas. The article was about her friend, Andy Kinslow, principal architect for Kinslow, Keith & Todd Inc., being a co-designer for a concept the firm calls the Oklahoma Weather Museum and Research Center. The cone-shaped building resembles a tornado.

The concept originated from a magazine article. Tulsa People magazine published an article in March around the theme of reimagining underdeveloped downtown properties in Tulsa. The magazine reached out to Kinslow, Keith & Todd Inc. and asked them to create a concept for an old property downtown. Kinslow said this proves the point that buildings don't have to be traditionally shaped.

From that article, Kinslow said word got around quickly as various media outlets became intrigued at the concept. The idea for the building has been published in media across the United States, Romania, Germany, France, China and many other countries. The tower also has caught the attention of potential developers and contractors.

"People are really interested in making it happen," Kinslow said in a recent phone interview.

One of Milby's reading lessons in March involved the book "Messenger, Messenger" by Robert Burleigh.

"(The character in the book) was riding around in his town and giving messages in people's mailboxes," said Jacob Peters.

Milby said she shared the text message Burris sent her and showed them images of the tornado tower concept.

"I told them about that text and I showed it to them and how I had gotten the message," Milby said. "I shared with them that I had gotten on the Internet and I had located, by Googling, their firm and information and the images that were there."

After Milby showed her class the photo of the concept, she asked what they thought about it and if they thought it should be built. They all said yes.

“That’s what triggered the discussion to bring the story to real life about how messages travel and how fast they travel,” Milby said.

She explained to the class what an architect was and talked about how the project takes a lot of work and money to complete.

Milby said she wanted the students to write letters to the firm explaining what the students liked about the concept and what changes or suggestions they would make to it. The letters also included drawings of how the kids saw the tower and she mailed them to the firm.

The concept for the tower already features a revolving restaurant, weather research center, weather museum, gardens and terraces, classrooms, an auditorium, severe weather laboratory, convention space and an observation deck.

“It could have stuffed tornadoes,” Devin Morris said, making suggestions on what to include in the tower’s souvenir shop.

Dakota Mullins suggested the architects include a library in the building with books about tornadoes.

Nicolas Sedano said he thought the building should have elevators available for those in wheelchairs.

“I said you can eat pizza on the rooftop,” Cameron

Butler said.

London Wilkins had a suggestion on the location for the building.

“I wanted it to be built in E’town,” London said.

Kinslow was happy to get the letters because he said the firm encourages young people to be creative. He said he decided he was going to be an architect when he was in third grade, so maybe this assignment of Milby’s will spur a new interest in some of her students.

“I think it’s good that she’s making them think about the components of a building and what could make it better,” Kinslow said.

Most of the suggestions the children made are already ideas for the tower, he said.

Kinslow said this assignment will show students the power of letter writing.

“They can see that by writing a letter. ... a simple act can have a big impact,” he said.

Kinslow also said he hopes the students will have a better understanding of social media and how fast messages can travel around the world.

On Thursday, Creekside Principal Laura Price delivered a package of gifts to the class from Kinslow, Keith & Todd Inc. The architecture firm sent personalized gifts to each student that included a pair of sunglasses, colored pencils with a case and hand sanitizer. The class used the pencils to write thank-you letters.

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