

# LOCAL NEWS

## STUDENT LIFE

### Serving students



**DEDICATED TO SERVICE:** Billy Rugh, founder of the Creative Planet School of the Arts on the First Presbyterian Church of Baldwin Park property teaching a fifth- and sixth-grade class. Rugh was recently awarded the David Chow Humanitarian Award, that came with a check for \$10,000.

WALT MANCINI / STAFF

## All-around teacher lifts classes

By Claudia Palma  
Staff Writer

**B**ALDWIN PARK — Mr. Billy is a “jack of all trades.”

Billy Rugh of Duarte is the founder of Creative Planet School of the Arts in Baldwin Park.

He is also the school’s principal, teacher, choreographer, set designer, nurse and more.

His work and dedication to the private magnet school and its students have not gone unrecognized. The David Chow Foundation recently honored him with its Humanitarian Award.

The award — and a \$10,000 check — were presented to Rugh on Jan. 16 during the school’s winter production, “Frozen,” at the Baldwin Park Performing Arts Center.

“The performance tonight is an example of why the school should receive recognition,” said Rugh, “I am proud to be a part of (the school).”

The foundation was started by the late David Chow — a Chinese immigrant who came to the United States in his teens and became a successful entrepreneur, businessman, kung fu and judo champion, actor, choreographer and humanitarian.

The foundation honors Los Angeles-area residents who dedicate their lives to helping others in need.

Rugh, a professional dancer, choreographer, director and teacher, first dreamed of opening an after-school arts program at El Monte Christian Academy, part of the Wesleyan Church, where he was a teacher.

In July 2001, he began the program with just a handful of friends and professionals donating their time and skills to teach classes such as dance and yoga.

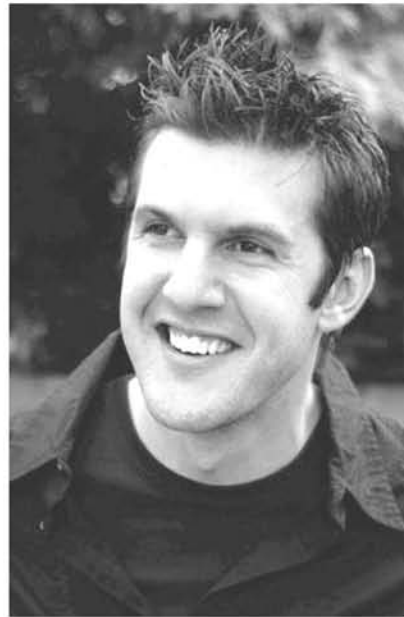
The Creative Planet School of the Arts found a permanent home in 2005 at the First Presbyterian Church in Baldwin Park.

The school now serves 70 full-time students.

Art is integrated into all classes, and

**‘Our giant global goal is to inspire other schools and make them realize that the arts are important in school.’**

**Billy Rugh,**  
founder of the  
Creative Planet  
School of the Arts



the school also offers after-school arts classes to the community, at \$5 a class, and summer camp programs.

“We treat students here as if they’re gifted and talented,” said Rugh, “It helps get their grades up.”

Students have consistently scored in the top 20 percent of the nation in SAT tests.

“I love that instead of just reading a passage in a history book, we can act it out instead,” said Janine Paredes, a part-time teacher.

Eighth-grader Sammi Sanchez says she enjoys the teaching and plans on attending the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts at Cal State L.A. and become a screen actor like Kate Winslet.

The 13-year-old Whittier resident says Rugh is a wonderful teacher and “is always really devoted.”

Jackie Chavez, a seventh-grader from El Monte who has been with the school for six years, says the school has taught her a lot.

“You’re not as smart at first, but they’re hard on you in academics,” said Chavez. The 12-year-old enjoys dancing and would like to be on Broadway.

With the school being a nonprofit and with 95 percent of all students enrolled on some form of financial aid, school finances are always an issue.

Harry Wong, a trustee from the David Chow Foundation, said that Rugh was awarded the \$10,000 “to help him give more young adults a place to learn about all the arts and themselves.”

“Our giant global goal is to inspire other schools,” Rugh said, “and make them realize that the arts are important in school.”

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# MR. BILLY

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wood resident — we're jealous," joked Duran.

Susan Rubio, city clerk for Baldwin Park, also presented Billy with a certificate of recognition in honor of him receiving the humanitarian award.

"Congratulations (Billy) on receiving the award and thank you for enriching the lives of this community," Rubio said proudly.

"The performance tonight is an example of why the school should receive recognition," said Rugh. "I am proud to be a part of (the school)."

Rugh also thanked the community for its continued support, the parents for "banding" together, and the First Presbyterian Church for staying open for the school.

## THE DREAM

Mr. Billy, a professional dancer, choreographer, director and teacher, first dreamed of opening an after-school arts program at El Monte Christian Academy, part of the Wesleyan Church, where he was a teacher.

In July 2001, that dream became a reality and he began the program with just a handful of friends and professionals donating their time and skills to teach classes such as dance and yoga.

After some disagreements, evictions, financial difficulties, and two churches later, the school finally found a permanent home. First Presbyterian Church in Baldwin Park welcomed the school in August 2005 and has been supportive of Rugh and the school since.

The church, which Rugh said is



WALT MANCINI / STAFF

**'MR. BILLY':** Billy Rugh, teaches fifth- and sixth-grade at Creative Planet School of the Arts in Baldwin Park on Jan. 23.

very liberal and big on the arts, supports the school financially.

The school now serves 70 full-time students.

Art is integrated into all academics. The school also offers after-school arts classes to the community, at only \$5 a class, and summer camp programs.

"We treat students here as if they're gifted and talented," said Rugh. "It helps get their grades up."

Students have consistently scored in the top 20 percent of the nation in SAT tests.

Rugh says that proves the arts helps them academically.

"I love that instead of just reading a passage in a history book, we can act it out instead," said Janine Paredes, a part-time teacher. "It's nice to be able to integrate."

## THE MAN

"I have gone through the jour-

ney with Billy and I never met anyone who is so empowered by the students and the arts," said Paredes. "All the teachers here love the kids and love the arts — we don't do it for the money."

Santo Ragno, co-founder, and director of development and long-time friend of Billy, said "There is no limit to what he can dream of."

"He has shown kids how their art can affect change in their community and other's lives," said Ragno.

Eighth-grader Sammi Sanchez says she enjoys learning all types of arts and plans on attending the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts at Cal State L.A. and becoming a screen actor like Kate Winslet.

The 13-year-old Whittier resident says Mr. Billy is a wonderful teacher and "is always really devoted."

"That's really cool," smiled

Sanchez after hearing of Mr. Billy's award, "he deserves it."

Jackie Chavez, a seventh-grader from El Monte who has been with the school for six years, says the school has taught her alot.

"You're not as smart at first, but they're hard on you in academics," said Chavez.

The 12-year-old enjoys dancing and would like to be on Broadway someday.

"Billy is a huge inspiration to me," Ragno admitted, "If it wasn't for him, there would be no school."

## THE FUTURE

Ragno says Billy teaches his students how to become better students, artists, performers, and how to help other children in greater need by using their art.

The students participate in various community events, such as parades, festivals, and even raised

\$50,000 last year for a sister church in Tanzania to help AIDS orphans.

The funds helped send doctors to Africa to help with the disease. The school is again raising funds to send six students and doctors back to Africa next year.

Billy said it is a way for the students to see firsthand what their efforts were for.

With the school being a non-profit and with 95 percent of all students enrolled on some form of financial aid, school finances are always an issue.

The school depends on corporate donors. Rugh is very excited that the David Chow award comes with funds that they can use towards the needs of the school, such as a playground, tap shoes, etc.

"I don't do well with praise," said a modest Rugh about the award, "but I'm very grateful."

Wong said that Rugh was awarded the \$10,000 "to help him give more young adults a place to learn about all the arts and themselves."

"Mr. Billy unselfishly gives of himself and is a fantastic mentor for all his students to follow," continued Wong.

Rugh said it's great that David Chow's legacy lives on through the foundation.

"I'm sure the students will come up with a giant art project to give to the foundation to show their gratitude for the award," said Billy.

"Our giant global goal is to inspire other schools and make them realize that the arts are important in school," said a hopeful Rugh.

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