



Hour photos / Alex von Kleydorf

12-year-old Kelly McKenna gives a hug to shopper Sandra Marks as Montessori schoolchildren promote World Peace Day in front of Whole Foods in Westport on Monday.

## Students mark World Peace Day

### Demonstrators wave signs, offer hugs and handshakes

By DANIELLE CAPALBO  
HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — In the parking lot of Whole Foods on the cusp of Norwalk and Westport, Carolina Martino beckoned her students from the Montessori Middle School.

"Over here," she said. "This is going to be a big customer."

Exiting the store were twin toddlers — Shaye and Katie — and their nanny, Anette Olsen.

The offer? Free hug.

A dozen students participated Monday in a lighthearted demonstration for world peace, waving handmade signs with upbeat slogans and volunteering hugs and handshakes to passersby.

"This is really cool," said Olsen, of Wilton, while Kelly McKenna, 12, crouched down to hug the girls. "Now we'll be in a good mood for the day — maybe for the week, or for



From left, Montessori schoolchildren Teague Chamberlin, Katherine Fennell, Anina Hoffman, Kelly McKenna and Michael Kimball promote peace on Monday at Whole Foods Market in Westport.

the year."

The demonstration was prompted by World Peace Day, which took place on Sept. 21, its goal to spread happiness while raising awareness about grim

global issues that threaten the concept.

"They believe strongly in peace, and they offer their help without needing to be asked," said Ramani DeAlwis, head of the

Montessori Middle School. "At our school, we practice peace every day. We have made a commitment to daily acts of kind-

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## Students demonstrate for peace

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ness throughout the year."

That commitment is evidenced, in part, by the frequency of service projects among students in the school.

Last December, 28 students cooked a full-course meal for 250 clients of the

Norwalk Emergency Shelter. In October, upper-classmen refurbished 70 bicycles for children in Arusha, Tanzania, through a program called "Revive the Ride."

Also valued are simpler gestures — a hug, for instance.

"It adds up," said Teague Chamberlin, 12.

While extending those gestures Monday, students touted colorful signs with slogans like "Give Peace a Chance." Another listed the word in six different languages.

"They are setting an example in the community," said Martino, a Spanish teacher.

As to be expected, there were holdouts among the shoppers — those who

glided by without a glance, firm in their morning routines.

Others offered commentary amid the chants for world peace.

"I wish that would happen," a woman said, strolling into the store.

Many more were charmed, however, stopping for hugs, asking students about their mission and complimenting their efforts.

"The fact that they're out here is great," said Eliza Holland of Norwalk.

Leaving the store with her toddler, Coen, Holland paused to accept a handshake from Chamberlin.

"What does it mean?" said Anina Hoffman, 12. "Peace is serenity and happiness for everyone."