

SKIPPING TO THE BEATS

Folk Singer helps students explore America's musical roots

By **Britt Carson**

STAFF WRITER

Students in Ryan Klein's third-grade class had no idea as they belted out the verses to "Skip To My Lou" that the song didn't originate in America.

Eight-year old Neil Ellingston has been playing the banjo for the last two years and enjoyed Dvorak's visit.

"'Lou' was changed from 'Loo,' and is the Scottish word for love," said folk singer Mark Dvorak, who spent Thursday at Cowlshaw Elementary School talking to students about the history of folk songs.

"It was pretty cool," Neil said.

"Isn't it funny how words change?" he asked the students. Dvorak talked about how immigrants introduced their own cultures to America, helping shape the music people are familiar with today.

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Mark Dvorak
FOLK SINGER

Third grader Alexlee Moreno and three classmates volunteered to be part of a "working song" called "Draw Me a Bucket of Water," which imitated the rhythm of work by pulling back and forth on each others' arms.

that a great deal of it came as a result of struggle and hardship. These songs have deep roots in American history, which is quite complicated."

"I liked it a lot," alexlee said of Dvorak's visit. "I learned a lot."

Dvorak spent the day in classrooms and then hosted two assembly programs. Chen said bringing in someone such as Dvorak makes learning history more interesting for students.

In between the history of the songs, Dvorak played his mountain banjo, 5-string banjo or guitar and had the students sing along with songs such as "She'll Be coming Around the Mountain" and "Oh Susannah."

"Music heightens students interest," Chen said. "When you survey kids, they often say social studies is boring. We try to spice it up a bit. Dvorak's presentation talks about real traditions and is a very lively walk through history."

Dvorak's visit was made possible through an artist-in-residence grant from the Indian Prairie Educational Foundation. Celestine Chen, a third grade teacher at Cowlshaw, was awarded the money and said she was thrilled to have Dvorak spend the day working with students.

"A lot of students know the old folk songs and I try to give them a broader context they might understand," said Dvorak who has been visiting schools since 1985. "The truth about American music is