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## Box Of Building Blocks

By JANIS D. FROELICH, The Tampa Tribune

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**DOWNTOWN** - The building of a city can begin with tiny strips of paper, carefully sliced at a paper cutter, bottles of glue and pencils for shading.

This is the approach at Sam Rampello Downtown Partnership School, 802 E. Washington St., where the goal is to create a model of downtown's standout buildings. The city's skyline is a detailed art project, beginning with the first structure to rise, the 1915-built Tampa City Hall, 315 E. Kennedy Blvd.

Art teacher Rena Santa Cruz said the model students are working on is part of a curriculum about how a city comes together, from the placement of manholes to zoning.

The national program, called Box City, is based on hands-on urban planning, deemed a perfect fit for a kindergarten through eighth-grade school in the middle of a thriving city, Santa Cruz said.

'We're not just constructing a building,' she said Friday morning as two students glued and penciled in the background on the city hall replica.

'We've done a lot of research on the history of Tampa,' she said.

The interest in learning about Tampa began in Rampello's summer camp, said Jim Elliott, who administers the program. About 100 students researched the area where their school is situated.

'They learned their school was built where Channel 8 used to be located,' Elliott said, 'but also this was once a campsite for Fort Brooke. So this extends way back.'

The students liked the subject matter so much they wanted to do more. So Santa Cruz introduced Box City. She said eventually students will be able to walk among the many buildings they have constructed of cardboard.

But first, city hall has to be finished. The deadline is the middle of November, when a ceremony involving Mayor Pam Iorio will be held. Next up, the art class hopes to build Tampa Theatre and have both structures ready for display at the Florida State Fair in February.

Lynsey Cunningham and Mitch Martel, both 11, said they were excited to learn about Tampa's past of pirates and soldiers. As he glued strips to city hall, Mitch said he liked his class tour of Oaklawn Cemetery so much he insisted his mother go there the next day with him so he could show her all he learned.

Leo Stoler, 12, another student working on city hall, is in docent training at Tampa Theatre.

'I've been to a few movies there, and it's nothing like the mall,' he said, adding that learning the history of Tampa has been surprisingly fun.

'I asked the students whether they wanted to construct the old city hall or the newer administrative building,' Santa Cruz said. 'And they overwhelmingly said the old one.'

Elliott said the tiered, wedding cake-style structure will include the landmark clock.

'What's great about our location is the students can actually go to these buildings and see the details like the cornerstone,' he said.

Tampa Bay History Center curator Rodney Kite-Powell said city hall is a good start for Rampello students because its construction signaled faith in a great future for Tampa.

'Based on its scale and design, Tampa was becoming pretty prosperous at the time,' he said.

Kite-Powell said a police station was built copying the first three stories of city hall but was bulldozed in the 1960s.

'We used to have a warped sense of the progress of downtown, tearing down these old structures for the new,' he said.

Phyllis Alexandroff, Hillsborough County's secondary education supervisor of art, who was visiting Santa Cruz, said it's exciting to see Box City take shape with the city hall project.

'It's a community project for students beyond their school world,' she said. 'It's wonderful academics, too, because of the math skills and problem-solving.'

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