

## Gate to the Hardy Garden



Photo courtesy of Maria Cristina Caballero

A group of Hardy fathers — six of them Japanese — and some friends of Tom Musco help to carry the 500-pound gate structure to its designated place.

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While sun rays softly crossed the intricate panels of a large white cedar structure being raised in the midst of a school's garden — as a traditional Japanese-style gate — Noriaki Iwase, father of Hardy School kindergarten student Momoka, noted: "Kamisama, our Japanese god, will come through this gate and will bring harmony and happiness to many families of this community."

The wide variety of usage of the Japanese word "kami" can refer to God, gods, angels or spirits. In some instances, kami are described as personified deities, similar to the gods of ancient Greece or Rome. In other cases, kami are the spirits dwelling in trees, or forces of nature.

Tomoe Ishi, mom of a Hardy third-grader, seemed to agree with Iwase  
“A positive force will come through the school's gate and will bring positive things, very good things,” she said. “We, the Japanese, will always remember how the Hardy community generously helped our people after the tsunami. The gate honors the goodness of this community.”

Iwase and Ishi's premonitions occurred on Saturday, Sept. 17, when the new gate was installed. Hour after hour — while the structure was being raised — there was sort of an enchantment around it, characterized by harmony, solidarity and many smiles. There was indeed cooperation among parent volunteers and joy among their children, who ate apple donuts, played and asked questions while the grownups worked. There were also teachers, school administrators and some neighbors, who timely arrived at 9 a.m. to either help move the heavy wooden blocks, patiently cut and carved for more than two years by Tom Musco, husband of Principal Deb D'Amico, or to simply encourage the parents who were doing so.

Other Hardy parents stopped by just for few minutes to thank Musco, a master timber framer, who donated not only his talent and about 250 hours of work, but most of the materials. The gate was donated in honor of Hardy's International Community and, in particular, the courage of the Japanese people in the aftermath of last spring's earthquake and tsunami.

The purpose of some Japanese gates, Musco explains, is to represent the interaction between our world and the spirit world. Japanese gates are also considered symbols of unity.

But beyond the symbolism, it also implied costs.

“A gate just like the Hardy gate would cost \$15,000 to \$20,000,” Musco estimated. The initial idea of raising a Japanese garden gate surged three years ago when Musco and D'Amico were helping a group of parents to build the wooden boxes for the school's garden, an initiative of the Hardy Parent Teacher Organization. Later, there was an informal discussion about creating an outdoor classroom.

Six Japanese Hardy mothers, who were practicing English as a second language at the school during the spring of 2010, were consulted about a variety of designs. “The Japanese mothers were able to tell me which designs were too formal, which gates would be used in the front of a home and which in the rear and which signified wealth and would therefore not be appropriate for a school,” Musco said. “They seemed drawn to the simpler designs. I fashioned the Hardy garden gate with all of this in mind.”

The Japanese mothers indicated that most gates are roofed structures supported by posts. The more posts, the higher the status. The form of roof atop those posts further indicates social status, with ordinary gates typically having a simple gabled roof, while more upscale gates feature more complex designs.

Cost of the materials purchased by Musco was about \$2200. Hardy parent Reba Cabral works for Home Depot and informed D'Amico who to contact to ask for the donation of the roof shingles and plastic pipes that are used as footings to hold the gate down and keep it from falling over. The cost of the donated materials from Home Depot was about \$175.

The Hardy gate is now a reminder about what's next: the outdoor classroom's design and construction. Musco confirmed he would also be willing to help with that project.