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Umpqua Post Photo by Jack Carrerow  
Lead student designer Richard Sanchez, left, holds his awards plaque and \$500 check presented to him at a Thursday assembly at Elkton High School by Larry Gescher, project manager from Zlayden Construction.

## Elkton kids honored by ODOT for bridge designs

By JACK CARREROW  
Staff Writer

Five Elkton High School students made a mark in their town by having their design for bridge pylons accepted by the Oregon Department of Transportation. The design will lend a little local color and history to the new Elkton Bridge, one of five being replaced on state Highway 38.

At an assembly Wednesday, attended by the 185-plus students from preschool to 12th grade, parents and several news media outlets, senior Delena Carrington, freshman Jackson Murphy and juniors Thaddeus Miller, Mac Smith and Richard Sanchez were honored, with Sanchez receiving a \$500 check for his artistic donations to the project.

"Last spring, the kids were told they could be involved in designing the project and they jumped at it," Debbie Williams, Elkton language arts teacher and coordinator of the project, said. "They did a magnificent job and deserve all the applause. They've really made a positive mark on the community."

The idea of involving students in the design was the brainchild of Lois Cohen, Regional Director of Zetlin Strategic Communications Inc., who came up with the idea of involving schools in community projects.

"I went to ODOT and they were all for it," Cohen said. "They've been very enthusiastic and today's proof of what can happen if kids get a chance to shine."

The \$46-million project will take about six months to complete, said Larry Gescher, the project manager from Slayden Construction Group of Portland.

"The kids did a great job and this should be a source of pride for the town," Gescher said. "It wasn't a competition with other schools. It was something that Elkton students were approached with, because it's their town."

Elkton Mayor Rebecca Swearingen also gave credit to the work the kids put into the project.

"This is not only great for these kids, who did such a wonderful job. It's great for the city," she said. "We are so proud of them."

The design for the bridge pylons will include statues of an osprey, a monarch butterfly, an elk and a salmon.

"These are all representative of Elkton," said Williams, who was also saluted for her involvement with the kids and the project. "Each of these animals will be part of the pylon design that will also include grape clusters to signify the vineyards that are becoming a part of the area."

One other item that will be placed at the construction site is a time capsule, in which each of the school district's classes from preschool to 12th grade placed artifacts.

The capsule, built by Elkton High School shop teacher Denny Quinby, will be opened in 75 years.

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## Art connects project to the community

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The kids all took turns placing items in the capsule, including a book about M & M candies from the kindergarteners, a CD from the fifth graders, a DVD from the sixth grade, an autobiography written by the second grade, a whoopee cushion from the high school juniors and Silly String from the eighth graders.

"I know I won't be around to see everything taken out of the time capsule in 75 years," Williams told the attentive crowd of children, "But hopefully, all of you will be around to see it open and remember this day."

ODOT public affairs officer Lissa Willis said this was the

first time in the department's history that a project was designed by schoolchildren.

"The enthusiasm and the way the kids got behind this really impressed me," Willis said. "It really helped connect the entire community to the project."

Willis added she was most impressed with the professionalism the kids exhibited in their designs.

For Sanchez, one of the juniors, helping with the design was a way for him to give back to the community.

"I think it's really cool that this is going on the bridge," Sanchez said. "It's weird to think that people 100 years from now will see what we did."