

# De La Salle Students Selling Homemades To Help School

By Georgina Gustin ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH 05/24/2009



De La Salle Middle School student Marques Caldwell (facing), 13, sells **MAKING IT** cookbook and gourmet dog bones made into the shapes of rabbits and squirrels in the Straub's parking lot in Clayton.

(Photos by John L. White/P-D)

**CLAYTON —** Marques Caldwell stood behind a table at the Clayton Farmers Market on Saturday, trying to rustle up business for his booth, which was stocked with an odd assortment of handmade products, from dog biscuits to cookbooks. The seventh-grader had been working his cell phone all morning, trying to lure customers to the market. "This is my summer job," he said, before returning, workmanlike, to his cell and punching in another number. And customers this summer are especially important. The more Marques sold, the more money he generated for his classmates at De La Salle Middle School, and the more money he pulled in, the more programs and field trips they can take.

De La Salle, a private Roman Catholic school, is one of a few middle schools in the city that follow a "nativity" model, designed to help kids prepare for high school — and, beyond that, college. Those middle school years, educators believe, are critical, often determining whether students will make it in high school or drop out.



**Detail photo of gourmet dog bones made into the shapes of rabbits and squirrels as they are sold by De La Salle Middle School students.**

"This is it," said Corey Quinn, president of the school at 4145 Kennerly Avenue. "This is their last chance." Almost 90 percent of De La Salle's 51 students qualify for school lunch support, and the area around the school is rife with unemployment, teen pregnancy and crime. Quinn, who had stopped by the booth for a few moments Saturday, was actually on his way to the funeral of a De La Salle graduate's brother, who was shot last week. That's the reality of these kids," he said. "This stuff happens every day."

The school identifies bright students, such as Marques, and through a rigorous program of long school days and extended school years, readies them for high school. De La Salle's first class, which entered the new school in 2001, is now in college. A full 100 percent of that class graduated from high school, and two-thirds went on to college. But, like so many schools that rely on private funding, De La Salle is running a little short these days.

Enter Marques, who is using his chatterbox charm to woo buyers into needlepoint dog collars and bandannas. It's not clear what will happen with the proceeds — the kids will decide. But, if Marques had to choose, he knows exactly what he'd do. "I want to go camping," he said. "Like we did last year."