



Tiogue Elementary Principal Domenic Giusti and Billy Gilman are pictured during the annual Tiogue graduation ceremony.

Photos by Kendra Port

# A familiar voice visits Tiogue Elementary

Singer and local native Billy Gilman is surprise guest at school's graduation

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COVENTRY — Tiogue Elementary School students and their families celebrated the end of elementary school and the 17-18 school year Tuesday morning with their annual graduation ceremony for fifth graders moving on to the middle school next year. This year students were treated to a surprise guest visitor during the festivities — Rhode Island's own Westerly native and singer Billy Gilman.

Gilman showed up during a student performance of "One Voice," his hit single from 2000 in the school gym this week. He told students they nailed the song and gave his congratulations for their success. He said he was honored they chose his song to perform at the ceremony.

According to principal Domenic Giusti, who came up with the idea of bringing Gilman in, the students sing the song at graduation every year, and he thought it would be a pleasant surprise to bring Gilman out after they performed his song.

"This is my first year at Tiogue, so I had not been part of that tradition," said Giusti. "When the kids rehearsed a few weeks ago I heard them sing the song and immediately thought of Billy."

Giusti said he's known Gilman for several years, having met through a mutual friend while he was working as a principal in East Providence. The two



Gilman congratulates fifth grade Tiogue Elementary students on their graduation.

both reside in Hopkinton.

"He is an icon in our town," said Giusti. "I mentioned that we were singing one of his songs and he immediately wanted to be there. Billy has such an incredible genuineness about him, and I thought that it would be terrific to have him at our school. Everyone was surprised, including most teachers. I only told a few people about it."

"I'm home right now and my whole team doesn't start emailing me till later in the day, so I thought why not just pop over and say hi," said Gilman before entering the gymnasium Tuesday. "I'm

so grateful they chose my song. I mean, they could have chosen any song."

"It's a song that gets you," said Tiogue instructor Tara D'Aleno. "Billy was so touched to hear our amazing fifth graders singing his song. When Mr. Giusti called him he was honored. He said it was so special for him and was thrilled to be a part of the fifth grade celebration."

Giusti said he is proud of the group of students, who will be moving on to Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School

See GILMAN, page A3





Student Hannah Jackson accepts her certificate from Giusti.

## Gilman

Continued from page A1

next year to begin the next stage of their academic careers.

“They have such great heads on their shoulders and have a true sense of wanting to help others in need,” he said. “We

know that they will represent Tiogue in such a positive way when they go to AS-FMS.”

“We are so incredibly proud of our fifth graders,” fifth grade teachers Jeanna Sinotte, Susan Flynn and Wendy Bettez said in a statement. “Additionally we would like to thank all of the families who have guided, supported and

inspired our students from the moment they walked through the doors of Tiogue School. We thank all of the families for sharing your children with us. Best of luck in your next journey through middle school.”

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