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Cecil Elementary School students decorate gingerbread houses Wednesday at the Hilton Garden Inn at Southpointe for a holiday gingerbread display in

the hotel lobby. The display also will include houses made by Bentworth High School students and the hotel's culinary staff.

Hotel's gingerbread village a work of art

Southpointe culinary staff, students create delightful treat

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With its train track winding past colorful buildings, the miniature village in the Hilton Garden Inn at Southpointe is a typical holiday display with one exception: This town is edible.

The gingerbread village includes buildings made by members of the hotel's culinary staff, high school students from Bentworth and kindergarten students from Cecil Elementary School.

The gingerbread village will be on display in the hotel's lobby during the holiday, beginning Monday. It was the idea of Hilton executive chef Jeffrey Clark, who,

along with pastry chef Erin McCloskey, set up the display.

Six cooks from the Hilton Garden Inn and Jackson's Restaurant competed to create the larger gingerbread buildings. They were given a choice between decorating a colonial or ranch-style gingerbread house.

While several cooks chose to make a traditional house, others converted theirs into commercial buildings. The only rule was that everything on the building had to be edible. One house features miniature Oreo cookies for a roof, and the stained-glass windows, Clark said, were made by using gelatin sheets and melted Life

Savers.

Judged by the hotel's management staff, the winner was Candace Sapienza, who spent nearly 27 hours creating a gingerbread toy store. Her finished product included decorating the interior as well as the exterior. Sapienza is completing an externship with the hotel as part of her studies in the Cordon Bleu Program of the Pennsylvania Culinary Institute in Pittsburgh.

Students from Bentworth High School began work on their gingerbread house in November, and on Wednesday, 31 students in the morning and afternoon kindergartens at Cecil Elementary ap-

plied gum drops, chocolate chips, licorice and other confectionery delights to their gingerbread homes. At times, they were torn between putting the candy onto the house or just popping it into their mouths. They first worked in groups to create six houses for the hotel's display and later made their own houses to take home with them.

Clark said the buildings are shellacked to help preserve them. As long as they aren't stored in a humid place, they will last several years.

Although Clark has done similar villages at other places he's worked, this was the first time he hosted such a joint venture at the Hilton and hopes to do so again.

"It's been fun for me, too," he said.