



ADVANCE PHOTO ■ FRANK J. JOHNS

During their visit to Howland Hook container port, students from PS 44 in Mariners Harbor release multi-colored balloons.

# World of knowledge in a box

By DON GROSS  
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Less than a month ago, 10-year-old Francis Mbaeiwe thought the toys he saw lining the shelves at the Toys R Us store in New Springville were made in a room in the back of the store.

But now the fifth-grader at PS 44 in Mariners Harbor knows they are made all over the world and are shipped back and forth between nations the way he and his friends trade Pokemon cards.

That's because he and his 24 classmates have been tracking the progress of a shipping container dubbed

**PS 44 students learn about commerce and geography by tracking a container from Japan to Howland Hook**

the Boomerang Box as it was carried by boat, train and truck from Japan, across the U.S. to New York, where its load of Sony TV monitors was emptied into a warehouse.

And yesterday, Francis and his class were able to view

the container at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's Howland Hook container port before it is loaded with home playground equipment made in Ohio and shipped to the Toys R Us Hong Kong store.

The program is sponsored by American Presidents Line (APL). The container is tracked by thousands of students worldwide over their Internet site as it makes its way around the world.

The box originally set sail from Seattle three years ago when the program was started by the Port of Seattle, the shipping line, King County, Wash. and schools in Washington state.

The shipping container is equipped with a radio transmitter and the box can be traced almost anywhere at any time by anyone logging onto the Web site at [www.apl/boomerang](http://www.apl/boomerang).

The Boomerang Box will be filled within the next several days at the Toys R Us warehouse in Mount Olive, N.J. and then begin its trip to Hong Kong.

The container stands out from almost any other container in any port. Painted bright blue, it is painted with "postage stamps" designed by students.

Since it first set sail, according to Joe Assante, a spokesman for APL, it has carried almonds, parts for jet engines and cotton.

Teacher Carmen Terrotto said her students had a hard time coping with the knowledge that what they wore, ate and played with came from such far off places as Latin America.

But coming to the container port made it all hit home.

School principal Doreen Gardner said the program has excited the students, making geography come alive for them along with providing an introduction to world commerce.

"Now they're on the Internet writing to pen pals everywhere the container goes," she said.

The students were astounded by the number of shipping containers piled four and five high on the grounds of the again-booming port which stood empty from 1987 until 1996.

Carmine Ragucci, president of Howland Hook Container Terminal, pointed to several pallets filled with boxed bananas and pineapples and said some 85,000 boxes of this fruit move through just one warehouse on the site each week.

An even more impressive number was given to them by Lillian C. Borrone, director of port commerce for the Port Authority. She told the students 2.5 million shipping containers similar to the Boomerang Box flow in and out of Port Authority piers each year.

Jerry Cammarata, Staten Island's representative on the Board of Education, was thrilled with the idea of introducing students to international trade and the maritime industries.

"The maritime field is growing very fast," he said.

The education official said he had been talking with Ragucci about establishing a charter high school on the grounds of the port to teach students about the maritime industries and to bring New York students into the field.