



# COMMUNITY *Comment*

*Nurturing the Gifts of Mind, Body & Spirit*

*December 2009*

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## **Leadership Wing to Open Jan. 4**

*by Matthew Gould*



*View of the new wing from the Communisaurus playground*

Within just a few short weeks, Community School’s new Leadership Wing will open to the great delight of our oldest students and their teachers. The Leadership Wing is specifically designed to meet the programmatic needs of our Fifth and Sixth Grade students. Its opening represents the culmination of much planning, discussion, and hard work. The facility is simply spectacular and will truly enhance the experience for those Community School students enrolled today and for those who will attend the School in generations to come.

The Leadership Wing is born out of many years of thought and perseverance. The idea of facility enhancements first gained root during the 2005-2006

strategic planning process. This process, chaired so ably by Sandy Rogers, involved a broad cross-section of our school community and included Trustees, parents, teachers, administrators, and alumni. The process led the School to focus on four broad areas for future development and growth – program, marketing and enrollment, diversity and inclusivity, and facilities. While the School has worked diligently on all four of these areas, we knew that facility enhancements would require deliberate focus.

Hence, during the 2006-2007 school year, the School’s Buildings and Grounds Committee, chaired by Tom Helmkamp, began the Master Facilities

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## Community Comment

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Planning (MFP) process. After a competitive bidding process, Christner Architects was chosen to lead Community School in creating its MFP. All constituents of the School — parents, teachers, Trustees and alumni — participated in describing “needs,” “wants,” and “dreams” for the Community School facility. At the top of everyone’s list was improving the Fourth Grade classroom experience, improving traffic flow on campus, and improving the functionality of the School’s kitchen. Other ideas included a new performing arts facility as well as an early childhood gross motor room.

In 2007, Community hired Rocky Ford & Associates to assess the School’s fundraising capacity as well as to judge which projects the community was most willing to support. Led by Greg Fox and a core group of volunteers, the School launched the *Branching Out* Capital Campaign in early 2008. Despite the economic downturn, we found the community overwhelmingly supportive of our efforts to raise money for a new driveway, a renovated kitchen, the Leadership Wing, a new front entry plaza, renovated administrative offices, and

the endowment. We were thrilled to reach our \$8 million goal by the end of the 2008-2009 school year with 100% participation from the Board of Trustees, 100% participation from the faculty and staff, and 83% participation from the parent body. Such high participation speaks to the power of this school community that we were able to come together to reach this ambitious goal and create something truly unique from all other elementary schools in St. Louis.

With the hard work behind us, it is a thrill to finally see the Leadership Wing become a reality. The wing is a two-story addition with the upper floor devoted to Sixth Grade and the main floor to Fifth Grade. Loaded with ample windows looking toward the campus’ western woods, the oversized classrooms provide plenty of space for the entire class. The classrooms are also dividable by use of a retractable wall so that teachers can work with students in small groups. Each floor also has a seminar room so that academic groups can get even smaller. On each floor there are boys’ and girls’ restrooms, cubby rooms,





### *HeadLines, continued:*

and offices. As a bonus space, the upper level has a lounge area where cozy, den-like furniture will provide a welcome area for students and teachers to relax, read or socialize.

One of the extraordinary things about the Leadership Wing is that it will beautifully complement Community School's philosophy of education. First and foremost, having the Leadership Wing for our oldest grades allows Fourth Grade to take over the previous Sixth Grade room. Through this move, Fourth Grade gains much-needed space and flexibility, as well as removing them from being next to the driveway/service area and its distractions. At last, their classrooms will be on par with the rest of the grades.

The new space will also truly highlight the Sixth Grade program by honoring its emphasis on leadership, responsibility, role modeling, and academic excellence. We ask a lot from our sixth graders. We ask them to raise the flag each morning, lead Thursday Assemblies, serve younger students at lunch, help with carpool every afternoon, and generally act as role models for the rest of the student body. The Leadership Wing highlights all of this by giving our oldest students an age-appropriate space



built specifically with their needs in mind. The wing allows for differentiated curriculum and instruction as it affords multiple meeting spaces for small-group instruction. Finally, the Leadership Wing will be outfitted with state-of-the-art technology which, in the hands of our students and teachers, will truly advance the learning process.

The fact that the Leadership Wing has come to reality is testament to the strength of Community school. From the beginning, there was the vision of creating something incredibly special for our oldest students — something totally different from what exists for students this age anywhere in St. Louis.

But having vision is one thing; having the hard work and perseverance to execute that vision is quite another. I genuinely thank all those who had a hand in turning this vision into reality. It took so many, but then again, that is the power of this community. I know we all look forward to January 4, 2010 when our oldest students find their new classrooms, find their new cubbies and desks, and set about the work of creating a new future.

*(Facing page): The 6th grade classroom on the second floor*

*(Above): Furniture in the 5th grade classroom waiting installation*

## **Ribbon Cutting on December 17**

All are invited! The formal ribbon cutting for the new Leadership Wing will take place on Thursday, December 17, the day before school gets out for Winter Break.

The ribbon cutting will take place in the gym during a Thursday morning assembly beginning at 8:15 a.m. Invited dignitaries include the mayor and city council members from Ladue; key personnel from Christner Architects and

Hensley Construction; and the *Branching Out* capital campaign committee.

Immediately following the assembly, students and guests will be dismissed to the new wing, where they will be able to walk through and get a sneak preview of the new facilities.

Students will occupy their new classrooms when they return from their Winter Break in January. During break,

the Fifth and Sixth Grades will move into the new wing. Fourth Grade will move into the current Sixth Grade, and the Learning Center will move into the current Fifth Grade. Upper School Director Cathy Haines will also have her office in the new wing.

Please join us for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and celebrate Community's latest success!



by Andrew Tuteur

## A Day in the Life of SK

This article is part of an occasional series highlighting the educational program at Community. Although there is rarely a “typical” day at school, here are glimpses from a recent November day in Senior Kindergarten.

7:45 - Excited to be back at Community after Thanksgiving break, students begin to arrive. Backpacks and jackets are shed at cubbies. Books are checked in and out. Children hand in their Friday Folders.



8:00 - Calendar time has come. The month, day, and year are reviewed. The class loves to track how many days they have been in school by using straws to represent place value. Each day a straw is placed in the “ones” column until there are 10, then a straw goes into the “tens” column. When they get to 10 tens, students know it will be time for their 100s Day Celebration. Pennies and dimes are also used to track days, to introduce the concept of money.

8:45 - It’s a short walk to music with Mrs. Morrison. The class begins with a call and response: “Good morning, class.” “Good morning, teacher.”

Variations on the theme follow as the warm-up continues. Now fully engaged, the students are ready to sing.

With the Holiday Program only a few

days away, the children rehearse. Led by Mrs. Morrison on the keyboard, the children sing “Deck the Halls,” their voices filled with exuberance and joy. Before singing the next song, “12 Days of Christmas,” Mrs. Morrison directs the children’s attention to pictograms on the easel to help with the lyrics. She explains that the song dates back 700-800 years and originally was a memory game in which the gift for each day was improvised, then repeated as the song progressed. Next, the children sing their Chanukah song, “Holiday Memories,” followed by “African Noel,” based on a traditional folk song from the West African country of Liberia. Mrs. Morrison passes out instruments and they perform a student favorite, “Jig Jog Gee.” Finally, the students sing “Joyous Season.”

9:15 - The children return to the classroom and split into two groups. Half go to PE. Half remain in the classroom and



divide into two Language Arts groups with Mrs. Watts and Mrs. Reed. One group practices reading aloud. Similar letters, sounds, and word families are identified in the text. Words within words are discovered. For example, a student discovered the word “Mandy” contains the words “Man,” “an,” “and,” and “Andy.”



Another exercise involves students being given a paper on which the same letter is printed in several different fonts. Students cut out the letters and paste them into their “Words Their Way” workbook.” Letter recognition skills are developed and improved.

The other group cuts out pictures of things that begin with the letters “B” and “P” for a “beginning letter sound sort” exercise. Students then paste each picture to their exercise sheet under the first letter of the word represented. A separate exercise sheet contains words beginning with “B” and “P” (such as Box or Pig), under which there is a space for students to draw a picture of each word.

10:00 - The PE students return and divide into their reading/writing groups, while their classmates head to the gym.

At the gym, students take off their coats and form a circle in the center. They are led in stretching exercises. Much of PE is taught in French. During stretching, each body part is called out in French.

“Winter Wonderland” is the theme for PE. The students learn that the day’s activities include rope swing, “cross-country skiing,” “bobsledding,” “ice

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## P.E. the Community Way

by Janet Rodgers

When my oldest child started at Community School years ago, I anticipated the beginning of her PE career with trepidation. It seemed to me that she wasn't as fast or as coordinated as other kids her age. When I was young, my friends who weren't "good" at sports were always picked last for teams in PE, and hated it. Once PE wasn't required anymore, they never participated in it again. To this day, they do not like play-



ing sports or even engaging in outdoor activities.

However, when I questioned my daughter about PE once school began, she claimed to love it. I peeked in one day when I happened to be there, and



saw my daughter skipping down the blacktop with her group, dead last by a long shot, with a grin on her face from ear to ear. When her first written report came out in the fall, she received top marks in PE.

What was going on?

Curious, I wandered over for a chat with one of the PE teachers. It turns out that PE at Community School is very different from the gym class I remember. For one thing, effort is rewarded more than performance. The PE teachers do not keep score or talk about scores. They urge the children to play as hard as they can, but not to worry about the outcome. "That way, the children can play without fear of making mistakes that might affect the outcome of the game, and so they can refine their skills better. They learn to play for the joy of it," explains PE teacher Christine Bugnitz. The teachers understand that there



is a difference between physical education and athletics. "Athletics is about winning. Physical education is about

teaching children skills that will promote lifelong fitness. That is why we teach Tai Chi, yoga, and orienteering. That is why we set fitness test goals, climb the Alpine Tower, take the fifth graders on a five-mile hike, and so many more activities," Ms. Bugnitz adds.

Community School obviously realizes that physical education is important. Exercise, moving your body, and manipulating objects with your hands promotes brain development. In an era when many schools are cutting back on PE, Community School employs three full-time teachers, and students in grades one through six have PE every single day. Almost all units are taught to both genders, so girls play touch football and boys learn field hockey. "The boys might not admit it, but they love field hockey," claims PE teacher Nancy Schmer. I can personally vouch for that. My son loves the field hockey unit, I think owing to the fact that he and his classmates get large wooden sticks to hit each other with, and sometimes a ball.

Community's physical surroundings enable the PE department to provide something unique as well. The coaches try to hold PE outside whenever feasible, and they also use as much of the

*Continued on page 7*



## Advancement Update

by Mark Palmer

As support for our wonderful school continues to come in, we take this opportunity to thank each of our families, grandparents, alumni and friends who make Community School a philanthropic priority. Either through contributions to our Annual Giving campaign, gifts and payments to our *Branching Out* capital campaign, or support of our endowment, so many people make possible the incredible education received by the students in our care. The benefits of excellent teachers, essential resources, state-of-the-art technology,

and a beautiful campus the children enjoy every day are enhanced through your support. We appreciate all you do to partner with us in nurturing the gifts of mind, body and spirit.


We invite all those who have not yet given to our Annual Giving or *Branching Out* campaigns to do so prior to December 31, 2009 to take advantage of Community's nonprofit status for tax purposes. Gifts can be made using a Visa or MasterCard online at [www.communityschool.com](http://www.communityschool.com), over the phone


by calling Mark Palmer (Director of Advancement) at 314-991-0005 ext. 324, or a check may be sent via mail to the Advancement Office. If you would like to give through a transfer of securities, please contact our office for details.

Thank you for your support of Community School.




## Focus on Faculty

 P.E. teacher **Christine Bugnitz** received her Emerson *Excellence in Teaching* award at a ceremony at the Sheldon Theatre November 1. Congratulations to Christine!

 Teachers are continuing to improve classroom instruction and methods by attending professional development conferences. Here are a few of the recent workshops:

**Katie Norris** (JKW), **Julie Heitman** (1S), **Nancy Schmer** (PE), **Heather Sanders** (5), **Mindy Bezdichek** (3N) and **Kathy Fitzgerald** (Lower School Director) attended *Quality Curriculum Design: Mapping the Curriculum for Improved Student Achievement*. **Joelle Goetz** (ECC French) attended *Curriculum Mapping 101*. **Kathy Fitzgerald** attended the *National Association for the Education of the Young Child* conference in Washington, D.C. **Sharon Barn-**

**holtz** (N) is attending a workshop on *The Differentiated School*. **Cathy Haines** (Upper School Head) and **Jan Wisland** (2S) attended the *Math Forum*. **Lynn Christopher** (4N) attended the *ISACS Regional Conference*. **Andy Van Der Tuin** (Woodshop), **Marty Hoessle** (3N), **Debbie Willis** (4S) and **Pam Qualy** (6) attended *No Cost Ways to Green Your School*.

 **Judy Fisher** (Learning Center) will have an article, "Silence is Golden," published in the December 2009-January 2010 online issue of *Educational Leadership*.

## Admission Notes

Community's *Open House* and *Monday with Matthew* admission events went very well, with record attendance at *Monday with Matthew*. Applications are ahead of where they were at this time last year!

Our final "formal" Admission event is the *Information Coffee* to be held on Wednesday, January 20 at 8:30 a.m. If you know anyone who is in the process of choosing a school for their child(ren), please encourage them to attend! Word of mouth is still our single best marketing tool.

Don't forget to let prospective families know that they can fill out the application form online!



## What Exactly is the "Mystery of Mister E.?"

Mister E, the Consonant King, the Vowel Queen, that sneaky letter "Y" and all the other letters of the alphabet recently made an appearance at Community School as First Grade performed the biennial musical *Alphabet Kingdom* at a recent Thursday assembly. The original production, created by Drama



teacher Caroline Zarinelli, has become a favorite over the years!

The story goes like this: One day while walking in the woods, Ivana Readmore and her brother Will Readmore are magically transported into an alternate dimension called the Alphabet Kingdom where letters sing, dance and discuss the intricacies of the English language.

Will and Ivana learn how consonants are created in the king's workshop to add "zing" to words. The Princesses of the "P" reveal the huge number of words that begin with the letter "p." The king's Royal Chefs demonstrate how they cook up consonant blends.

Over in the queen's garden, the vowels show their flexibility in sounding "short" or "long" or "anything in between." The vowels also teach Ivana some of their rules,

such as "When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking" and how a silent "e" at the end of a word makes the first vowel say its name.

And then there is poor "Y," who is



always having an identity crisis - "Am I a consonant or a vowel??"

By the final tango, Ivana has learned many facts about words and letters and is ready to return home and start reading more books!

The first graders performed magnificently, and learned quite a bit in the process. Congratulations on a job well done!



### *PE, continued:*



grounds as possible, hiking and running cross country for example. "We play on rolling hills, as opposed to marked soccer fields," mentions PE teacher Jim Hoots.

The goal of the PE program at Community is for children to develop a desire for and love of physical activity and fitness. Children learn to play for the joy of becoming more agile, stronger, and more coordinated. Collectively, the Community School physical education staff has taught at Community School for over 60 years, and would like parents

to know that they believe in the program, the school and the children.

We did find my daughter's sport, and she is now an enthusiastic and brave participant in many outdoor activities. However, had she been in a traditional PE program, I'm not sure this would have been the case. When asked to express appreciation for a teacher when she was in 6th grade, my daughter wrote, "I appreciate my PE teachers because they taught me to be healthy and strong," and really, what more can you ask for?



*SK, continued:*

climbing,” and “ski jumping.”

10:20 - The students again form a circle. This time, for Tai Chi. “*It is time to slow down before we go back to class.*” In French, they are led in a series of traditional Tai Chi movements: “Aspirer (inhale)...Expirer (exhale).” Then, a student is chosen to create and share a new Tai Chi movement with the class (in English).



10:35 - After PE, it’s time for classroom cleanup, snack and reading. Supplies are put away, and each student gets a cup of pretzel sticks and heads for the carpet. Mrs. Watts reads *Into the Forest* with the students, who answer comprehension, prediction and vocabulary questions.

10:50 - Recess.

11:20 - Students on the Lunch Committee return from recess, wash their hands, and go to the cafeteria to help the teachers set tables and prepare for lunch.

11:30 - Lunch

12:05 - Back to the classroom and onto the carpet for counting games. Students count by 5’s and 10’s from 1-100 as a group, then in front of the class as part of a trio, duet, or solo. For a bigger challenge, some students count by 2’s.

12:15 - Students choose an activity: Read, draw, or rest. Some students choose to work on their reading/writing projects. Teachers provide extra individual attention to others. A few students relax on their mats, drawing words

printed in their Word Study Notebook.

1:20 - Students help with Echo’s (the leopard gecko) weekly feeding, ten live mealworms.

1:30 - Recess

2:10 - Students return from recess, then go to their cubbies to get ready for “Center Time.” SK East and SK West are combined for Center Time. There are 9 Centers: Math; Computers; Science; Writing; Dramatic Play; Puzzles & Games; Blocks; and Art. Center time is both educational and social, as children learn give-and-take while working together on activities.

2:45 - Students clean up the classroom, get their “Center Card” checked, and go to the carpet for “Star of the Week.” The Star of the Week addresses the class, sharing pictures and stories of family, travel, interests, activities, and other things important to the Star. The Star responds to questions posed by classmates and the teacher.

3:00 - Students wash their hands and have a snack before returning to their cubby to prepare for dismissal. Then it will be back again tomorrow for another exciting day!

## Community Candid's Spirit Day



*(Above pictures): Students (and sometimes their families) love participating in Spirit Day and the Cross Country Run.*