



COMMUNITY *Comment*

Nurturing the Gifts of Mind, Body & Spirit

February 2009

We Love Our Parent Volunteers!

Inside this Issue

Parent Volunteers.....page 1
Headlines.....page 2
Flower Sale.....page 3
DRA.....page 4
Circle of Learning.....page 5
Susan Hunkins.....page 6
Maintenance Program.....page 7
Advancement Update.....page 8
Focus on Faculty.....page 8

Walk through Community on any given day, and it's almost a guarantee that you'll see one or more parents actively engaged in a volunteer activity. Parents bustle about, both in and out of the classroom, involved in a multitude of projects – many of which the School would be hard-pressed to accomplish without their support.

Parents are encouraged to become involved in classroom activities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the little building. Parents in Nursery frequently drop in to do an activity, read a book to the class, or just to spend time. JK parents sign up for cooking activities, and can often be found making hummus, baking cupcakes, or designing graham cracker houses with the kids. SK parents also sign up to lead class activities, which may focus on their jobs or hobbies, or just a creative craft. In all grades, parents serving as Grade Chairs help plan parties and other activities for the class. Parents drive and help chaperone field trips, and are always encouraged to share their unique talents as learning opportunities for all of the



children, particularly as it relates to curricula the children are studying.

There are just as many volunteer opportunities outside the classroom. The Community Parent Association committees do a tremendous amount of work at the School, from conducting tours for prospective families to cataloging books in the Discovery Center to sending out massive mailing projects to organizing fundraisers and more!

Parents at a recent mailing committee workday commented on their volunteer activities. Leah Stroup said, *"I like to think my volunteering alleviates some of the work the faculty would otherwise have to do - this way they can spend more time with the kids."* Patricia Campedelli commented

continued on page 8

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*Above: SK Parent activity
Left: Mailing Committee*



Community Comment

The parent newsletter of

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2008-2009

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Headlines:

A Message from Matthew Gould

Community School: High Tech & High Touch

A parent recently asked me, "How does Community School prepare its students for life in this technological age?" As I thought about how to answer this seemingly easy question, my mind raced. I thought about how our youngest children use KidPix and how our second graders learn keyboarding. I thought of how our third graders use Inspiration, a software program that helps students web their thoughts before writing. Of course, I thought of the fifth and sixth graders' daily use of SMARTBoards and laptops, and how the sixth graders recently completed their Egypt research papers exclusively utilizing internet research and computer graphics.

While I feel like these examples serve as valid and legitimate uses of technology, somehow they don't quite answer the broader question of how we prepare students for a life of ever-increasing technological gadgets, machinery, and information. So I decided to check out the most recent Community School Technology Plan (approved in Spring 2008). The introduction of the Plan begins, "Community School is committed to technology being an interwoven piece of each discipline. All technology is regarded as a tool for students and teachers to access and present multimedia information throughout the core curriculum." This seemed more like it! At Community School, technology is simply a tool to enhance learn-



ing in the core disciplines. We are not teaching children *about* technology, we are teaching them how to *use* technology.

Yet, I must admit I still felt unsettled that, although this is part of the answer, it seems incomplete. So I began to think about Community School's core values and deeply held philosophy:

- We believe students should have close, loving relationships with responsible adults. We consistently strive to create the most nurturing environment for children.
- We believe students should experience nature and have outdoor activities every day.
- We see play as an important aspect of child development. During free play, children increase their imagination and creativity, organize their own games,





HeadLines, continued:

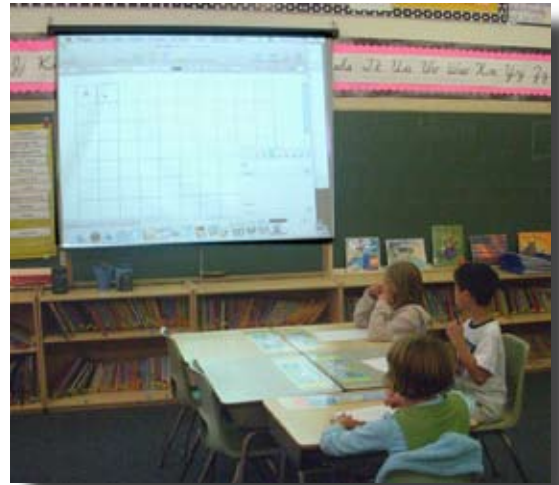
develop their own rules, learn problem-solving skills, and practice leadership.

- We believe in the power of the Arts. Woodworking, drama, music, band, and art all allow children to explore important right-brain learning.
- With the central goal of promoting academic excellence in our students, we recognize that children learn best as active participants, collaborators and problem solvers. Rich projects enable children to acquire the skills and conceptual understandings that lie at the heart of the formal disciplines.
- We believe children should be exposed to great literature, poetry, and mythology. Storytelling is a sacred art at Community School.

As I consulted Community School's core values, it hit me! We prepare our students for this technological age by teaching them HOW TO THINK.

Some technology has awesome potential; some is worthless. We teach our children GOOD JUDGMENT. We emphasize CRITICAL THINKING so students use technology as an appropriate tool. And we teach our children how to COMMUNICATE – perhaps the single most important skill our children can learn in this high-tech era.

So, in some ways, Community School is compensating for a computer-based society by providing our students with an education rich with human interaction, individual attention, and personal fulfillment. Will our students have the computer skills necessary to be successful in secondary school? Of course. More importantly,



our students will have the human skills necessary to be successful in this technological age and throughout their lives.

Matthew

Flower Sale 2009

by Heather Curry

As we zip winter coats and hear the groundhog predict even more cold weather, it is hard to believe that winter will ever end. But it will! And your garden beds can soon be blooming with beautiful flowers and lush foliage if you make plans to visit Community School's Flower Sale on Tuesday, April 21. As a cure to your winter woes, watch for the Flower Sale pre-order form in your Friday Folder on February 27. (We're ordering a little early this year due to the timing of Easter.)

Choose from a wide selection of bedding plants, potted plants, ground covers, tropicals, vegetables and more! Your children will also have an opportunity to get their hands dirty and pick out a plant during the day of the sale.

Don't forget — Administrative Professionals Day is Wednesday, April 22! Is there someone out there who deserves a beautiful plant or flowering basket from you?

Remember, pre-ordering is definitely the preferred method in order to ensure you get the best selection. All pre-orders may be picked up the day of the sale between noon and 5 p.m.

Not only will you be making your garden beautiful by buying flowers, but proceeds from the sale benefit the Community School Scholarship Fund.

Volunteers for the day of the sale (with or without green thumbs) are



still needed. If you are available, please contact committee chair Heather Curry at (314) 989-9006.



DRA Allows for Individualized Instruction

by Kerrigan Kaplan



The Community School faculty takes pride in the fact that students receive much individualized instruction. Throughout the day, the schedule allows teachers to work with a half or a third of their class at a time. This allocated time gives teachers the opportunity to help strengthen skills and strategies in the curriculum in a small group environment. There are many tools that the teachers use to determine how best to help students succeed. Multiple sources of information such as checklists, rubrics, observational data, and assessments are used as a base for making educational decisions. In the ongoing process of collecting details on each child, teachers gather information on what a student already knows and how they best learn, so that they can get students where they need to be.



For the past two and a half years, one tool utilized by Community School teachers has been the Developmental Reading Assessment, or DRA. The goal of the DRA is to help educators target students' instructional levels and help determine their current reading needs by collecting information and evidence of a students' learning. The

information gathered guides instruction at the individual level for students in grades SK-6. Unlike a "one to many" teaching approach, the DRA assesses students' individual skill levels in the three segments of reading: reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

According to Lynn Christopher (4N), who introduced the DRA to Community School, "*Every child has individual strengths, which they use effectively. These strengths aren't where our instruction is focused. The areas that are not strengths are the areas where teachers concentrate their instruction.*" This individualized learning approach promotes success for children in all areas of reading, from decoding to comprehension. This information follows each Community School student as they progress from grade to grade.

Sandra Cirrito, who is the Lower School Learning Specialist, explains that for those children who may not be progressing to reach their developmental reading goals, there is an additional DRA Analysis to pinpoint skills needing reinforcement. Parents often want to know how they can help. Mrs. Cirrito explains how important pre-reading skills are for the younger students. Her suggestions include, "*Parents can*

practice rhyming, letter recognition, holding books correctly, and talking about pictures." Parents can also ask questions, such as "*what did you like best?*" or "*what was your favorite part of the story?*" to engage children in reading at home. And they can encourage "silent book time" at home for the younger students to promote a passion for reading.

For all grades, the DRA helps find the appropriate reading level for each student, which ensures that a child is being challenged, but not frustrated during instructional time. The results of the DRA will inform a teacher's daily teaching as well as long-term plans for each student's learning.

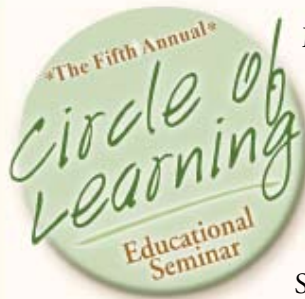


The benefits of the DRA at Community School are evidenced in both our teachers and in our students. This collection of data has been the impetus for many discussions among the faculty, which has led to improvement in what is taught and how it is taught. As far as our students, look around and you will see an amazing collection of avid readers, curious learners, and independent thinkers at Community School.



Community Welcomes Michael Thompson!

by Kerrigan Kaplan



Mark your calendars for the upcoming *Circle of Learning* Speaker Series, to be held at 7:00

p.m. on Thursday, April 9. Community School is extremely pleased to host Dr. Michael Thompson. His talk will focus on his book *The Pressured Child: Helping Your Child Achieve Success in School and in Life*.

Dr. Michael Thompson is a nationally known psychologist, school consultant, and author or co-author of eight books, including the New York Times bestseller, *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. Other books include: *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* and *Mom, They're Teasing Me*.

A dedicated speaker and traveler, Dr. Thompson has spoken at or consulted with more than 500 schools in the U.S. and abroad. He has appeared on the Today Show, the Oprah Winfrey Show, ABC 20/20 and CBS 60 Minutes. He was the co-author, host and narrator of a two-hour PBS documentary entitled *Raising Cain: Focus on Boys* which aired in January 2006.

According to Dr. Thompson, parents have forgotten what it is truly like to be a child. In his book *The Pressured Child*, he attempts to put parents "back in touch with the gritty reality of being a child in school."

Excerpt from The Pressured Child: The question "How was school today?" may be the most-asked and least-answered question in America. It is the question that all parents are compelled to voice every day sometime between three p.m. and bedtime.

"How was school today?" No matter how gently you ask it, no matter how cleverly you phrase it, 99 percent of children don't give you the information you crave. "Fine," they reply, or "Okay." Younger ones may give you some details; a child who is a real talker, a born journalist, may give you an extended news report. But such kids are rare. Most children don't share the kind of information about school that parents want to hear. Besides, they know that if they made the effort, you'd just ask again the next day. You'd never be satisfied.

But what do we really hope to learn from that question we keep asking? I imagine a parent asking a child, "How was school today?" and the child answering with something like this:

"Mom, I'd like to tell you, I really would, but it is all too complicated to put into words. I don't know where to begin. The truth is that

you're not asking me about school really, you're asking me how my life is going, and I don't have any perspective on that. I'm trying to develop into a person here and sometimes the school seems to be something of a help and at other times it feels like it is totally in the way of my becoming a person. Besides, why do I have to tell you what school is all about? Didn't you go to school? Don't you know what school is like? Why keep asking me?"



Join us Thursday, April 9 for another engaging *Circle of Learning* event as we learn more about how our children are really feeling about school and life. For more information on Dr. Thompson and his work, visit www.michaelthompson-phd.com.

Wotka Book Talk - March 4

Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children

Join us on Wednesday, March 4 to discuss another of Dr. Thompson's best selling books! The talk, led by librarians Debbi Krieg and Terri Kerley, will take place in the Discovery Center. All interested parents and faculty are welcome to join the discussion. This will be an excellent way to prepare for Dr. Thompson's talk on April 9!



Calm, Creative, Charming

by Laura Falk



“Great fun to work with, extraordinarily calm under fire, incredibly creative — not to mention a wonderful friend!” These words are from parent Suzanne Johnson, but could probably be attributed to any one of the many parents who have worked closely with Susan Hunkins over the past 13 years.

In an announcement last spring, Susan shared with Community that she would be leaving to take over her family’s event planning business, *Kramer Hunkins & Associates*. A wonderful opportunity for Susan — yet her absence will leave a huge void at Community.

For the past 13 years, Susan has been Director of Advancement (formerly titled Director of Development) at Community School. This has put her in charge of all the School’s fundraising efforts, including Annual Giving, Cornucopia, and Community Classic, as well as various capital campaigns which have raised money for air conditioning and the endowment, not to mention the current *Branching Out* campaign.

In addition to her fundraising work over the years, Susan coordinated most of the volunteer parent committees, including Book Covering & Repair, Book Show,

Community Classic, Cornucopia, Faculty Hospitality, Fall Picnic, Grandparents & Special Friends Day, Mailing Committee, and Yearbook Committee. This work brought her into the lives and hearts of Community parents.

Susan has also been the touchstone for alumni, as well as the unofficial keeper of Community School’s history. Whenever a question pops up about when something happened or how something came to be, Susan always knows the answer. For many years, she has led the first graders on the annual walk around Community School, telling them about the history of the School with her wonderful stories.

At the School since 1996, Susan has been not only an administrator, but a parent as well. Her two youngest children came to Community when she did — Sam starting in First Grade, and Sarah in Fourth. Susan believes that having children here gave her a unique perspective on the School and enhanced her ability to promote Community to both its constituents and the greater St. Louis area.

Head of School Matthew Gould comments, “*In the time Susan Hunkins has been at Community School, she has turned a sleepy little Development Office into a high functioning, full-scale Advancement operation involving fundraising, parent programs, communications, and alumni relations. But the thing we will miss most about Susan is the warm and gentle way she interacted with all Community School constituents. All who know Susan, love her. I wish Susan all the best with her new adventure in life and am confident that she will be successful.*”

Although she announced her resignation last spring, Susan agreed to stay through part of this year for two reasons. One, to ensure a smooth hand-off to the new Director of Advancement, Mark Palmer. Secondly, to help see the *Branching Out* capital campaign — the biggest in the School’s history and one she shepherded from the beginning — through to its final stages. Coming up in March, she will say her farewells to the School, at least in her official capacity. However, as she is a past staff member and past parent, we hope to see her around for many years to come.

On a personal note, it has been a joy to work with Susan over the past four years. Susan has been a wonderful mentor and friend, and her charm and gracious demeanor are qualities I strive to emulate.

Susan, all of us here at Community wish you the very best in your new career — may you thrive there as you have here at Community!

Please join us for a reception in Susan’s honor Thursday, March 5 9:00 am - 10:00 am in the Haven Art Gallery.



Matthew & Susan at the Branching Out kickoff party in September.



Maintaining Community

by Andrew Tuteur

Cleaned all restrooms, offices, and classrooms. Scrubbed and buffed all tile floors. Shampooed carpets in the Community Center, Haven Art Gallery, hallways, ECC, and grades 1, 2 and 4. Scrubbed gym floor and cleaned gym mats. Scrubbed and waxed multi-purpose room and front entrance floors. Repaired roof leak over Learning Center. Repaired damaged ceiling tiles in Learning Center and 2nd Grade. Cleaned woodshop. Cleaned up storm damage.



Repaired electrical problem in 2S. Rolled fields from parking/tire damage from holiday program. Put away all holiday decorations and risers. Reset Community Center furniture. Repaired tile in girls' restroom. Pumped out grease trap.

Repaired damaged ceiling tiles in Learning Center and 2nd Grade. Cleaned woodshop. Cleaned up storm damage.

Tired yet? The above list is some of what the maintenance crew accomplished just over Winter Break. Maintaining the beauty and functionality of Community's 16-acre campus is no small task. Built between 1935 and 1995, each building at Community presents its own unique challenges.



Under Facilities Manager Bill Bauer's leadership, the team runs an organized program of proactive facilities management. Unlike a "fix what's broken" approach, maintenance has a central



community campus; area by area, building by building, room by room, fixture by fixture. Notes as to the relative age, condition, and maintenance requirements are logged into the database. From this a continuing 5-year maintenance schedule is established for Community. From replacing carpet to applying fresh paint, from re-sealing blacktop to refinishing floors, Community's recurring maintenance needs are prioritized and planned years in advance.

As we all know, one of the aspects that sets Community apart from other area elementary schools is our campus. Keeping the grounds and nature trail freshly groomed and the blacktop and roads in top condition is a challenge in itself. Community's grounds

are meticulously maintained, both beautiful and safe for kids. The grassy fields are fertilized, watered, mulched, and mowed to perfection. Anyone walking the nature trail will enjoy a clear path with fresh wood chips underfoot. Snow and leaf removal and keeping the sidewalks and driveways clear are a high priority in fall and winter.

So who makes up the Maintenance team? They are rarely seen all at once due to their staggered schedules. Working from as early as 6:30 a.m. to as

late as 10:00 p.m. – much of the magic they perform happens while students and faculty are away. In addition to Facilities Manager Bill Bauer, the rest of the team

includes Mary Daus, Edgar Davis, Bo Ficker and Sharon Mers.

"We have a great Maintenance staff. Nobody realizes what goes on behind the scenes. They just don't get enough recognition for everything they do. They are definitely the unsung heroes of Community School," commented Business Man-



ager Christine Ficker, administrator in charge of maintenance.

What keeps the maintenance crew ticking? An earnest appreciation for their important role here at Community School. Bill Bauer says, *"We keep the best environment we can so kids can learn. We are responsible for their environment."* Obviously, the team takes great pride in Community's campus. And Community takes great pride in the wonderful maintenance staff.



Advancement Update

by Mark Palmer

Our wonderful volunteers at Community have been hard at work this winter preparing for our biannual fund raising events: the Community Classic Family Party and Parent Party. We express our most sincere appreciation for all those who have pitched in to make these events so successful. In addition, we thank all those who diligently contribute to each of our committees in the Community Parents Association. Your time and effort mean so much to our faculty and students!

As the primary source of supplemental support for the school's day-to-day activities, the Annual Fund allows parents, grandparents, alumni and friends to provide for our kids in a meaningful and mutually beneficial way. With an ambitious goal of \$440,000 this year, we are happy to report that we are more than 85 percent to reaching our target. To all those who have contributed thus far, please know how grateful we are for

your dedication and support, even during difficult times. To those who have not yet had the opportunity to participate, we invite you to join in helping us reach our goal by making a tax-deductible gift today. Together, we can ensure our students and teachers have all the resources they need.


Don't forget our upcoming events:

April 9 – Circle of Learning Speaker Series – Michael Thompson, Ph.D. – 7:00 p.m. in the Community Center

April 18 – Community Classic Parent Party – 7:00 p.m. Zodiac Room at Neiman Marcus

April 21 – Flower Sale

May 8 – Grandparents & Special Friends Day



Join us at the
Community Classic
Zodiac Party
in the


Zodiac Room


at Neiman Marcus
in Plaza Frontenac

Saturday, April 18
7pm - 10pm

Invitations arriving soon,
but mark your calendars now
for this stellar event!

Focus on Faculty

 Congratulations to Chef **Mike Storey** & wife Amanda on the birth of Emily Ann Storey on January 20, 2009!

 Teachers & staff have been busy with professional development! **Fourth, Fifth & Sixth Grade teachers** were trained in *Hands-On Equations*, a visual and kinesthetic system for introducing and teaching algebraic equations. They are now using this information in their classroom math lessons. **Kristen Ruckman** & **Heather Sanders** (5th grade) also took additional training on the game *Equations*, which encourages students to apply the math they already know to solve complex problems, as well as learn new concepts. *Equations* is being used in the before-school class Math Mania.

Katie Norris & **Kristin Hornell** (JK) attended a class on *101 Mini Lessons to Strengthen Your Preschool or Kindergarten Program*. **Darla Ellsworth** (JK) attended a conference on *Enhancing Early Literacy*. **Debbie Barmeier** (1S) went to *What's New in Children's Literature*. **Cathy Haines** (Upper School Head) & **Kathy Fitzgerald** (ECC Director) participated in the ISACS Academy for Division Heads. **Christine Bugnitz** (PE), **Sharon Barnholtz** (N), **Judy Fisher** (Upper School Learning Specialist) and **Pam Rothschild** (6) attended a daylong session with NAIS President Patrick Bassett. Finally, Director of Advancement **Mark Palmer** attended the CASE/NAIS Annual Development Conference in Denver.

Volunteers continued from page 1

that volunteering has “made me feel part of a community.” Everyone also agreed that it's fun to see their kids troup by on their way to an activity, and that the camaraderie makes the work light.

Parent involvement has been a hallmark of Community School since the very beginning. Through generous gifts of time and effort, our parents continue the tradition by playing a vital role in bringing the philosophy of the School to life. The School truly believes School-Parent cooperation is vital to the students' life and the life of the School. Thank you to everyone who volunteers!