

September 2007

WILLIAMSBURG'S

Next Door Neighbors

VOL. 1, ISSUE 6

PRICELESS

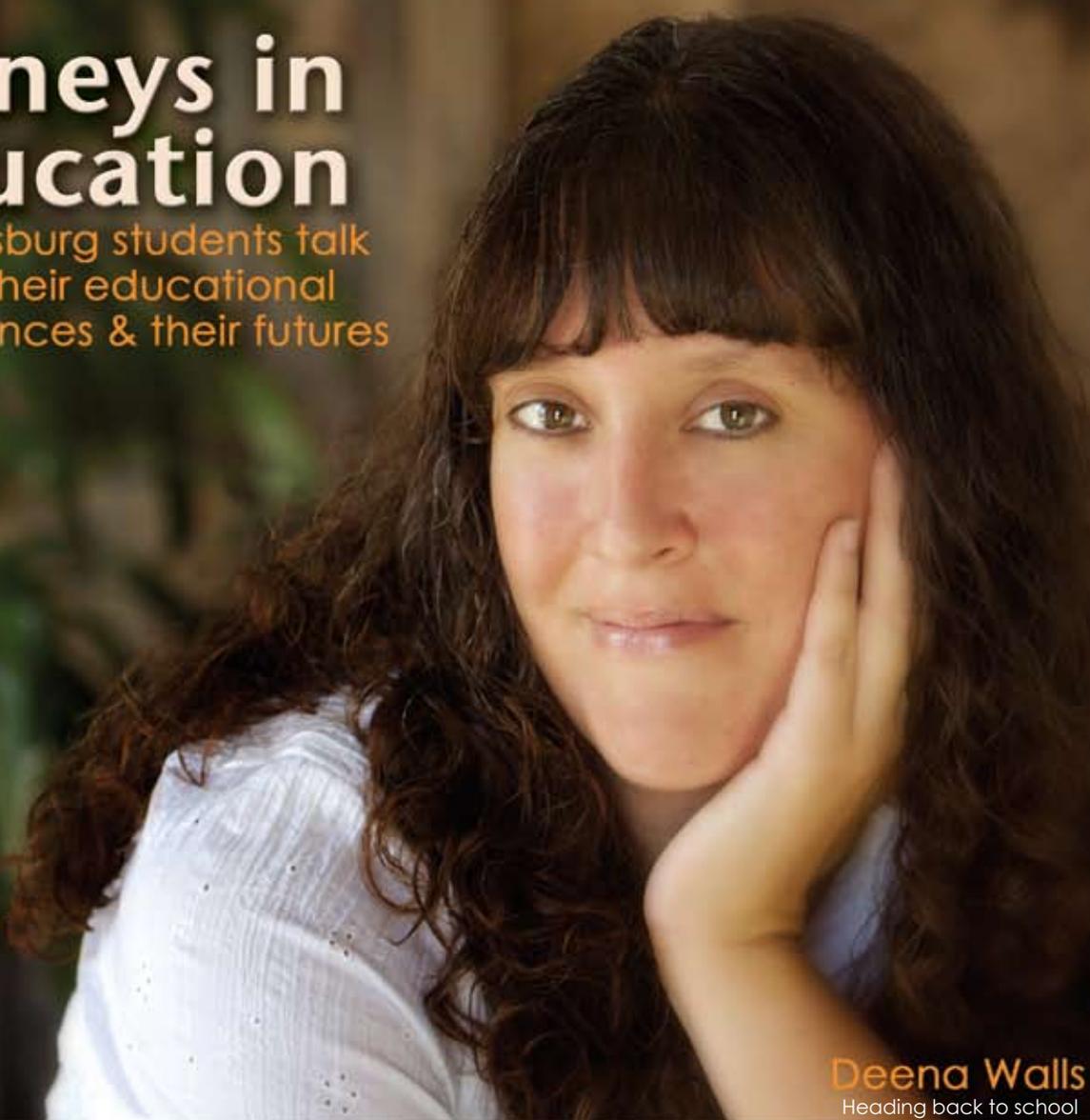
Discovering the people who call Williamsburg home

Journeys in Education

Williamsburg students talk about their educational experiences & their futures

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Deena Walls
Heading back to school

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COVER PHOTO & DESIGN BY MONICA SIGMON

Good news! I wanted to start this issue by letting you know that my husband and I now live in Williamsburg. You may have noticed that the return address on the magazine has previously shown a Chesapeake, VA address. A few weeks ago we were finally able to sell our home, something we had been trying to do for months, and we now live off Jamestown Road in Williamsburg.

This is important to me for a number of reasons: First, I think I can do a better job bringing you relevant and interesting stories if I live here and become a part of this community. It's a real disadvantage to produce a magazine for Williamsburg devoted to human interest stories about its people when you are observing from the outside in. Fortunately I have some very talented writers who are producing excellent work each month who also live here: Karen Haywood Queen, Muna Killingback, Suzanne S. Lanier and Linda Landreth Phelps. Often I have relied on their insight to make sure our stories were on the mark.

Second, I think every community develops its own culture and one can only understand that culture by fully experiencing it. If my stories are going to ring true with my readers, I need to live here to know how to connect with them. I want to get to know the community better and build relationships with people in this area.

Third, I spent 25 years in the newspaper business and I am definitely "old school" when it comes to certain aspects of the business such as journalistic integrity, and yes, where a publisher should live. After fourteen years learning the newspaper business in Lynchburg VA, I spent some years working in other places including Alabama, Maryland and Hampton Roads at both *The Virginian-Pilot* and the *Daily Press*. I published six community newspapers in Baldwin County, AL near Mobile: *Fairhope Courier*, *The Baldwin Times*, *The Islander*, *The Bulletin*, *The Onlooker* and *The Independent*. I have also published several military newspapers including *The Globe* (Camp Lejeune), the *Rotovue* (New River Air Station) and the *Sentinel* (Fort Hood, TX). One thing an "old school" newspaper person feels strongly about is living in the community that is being served by that newspaper. I don't think it should be any different for a magazine like *Next Door Neighbors*, one

that is devoted to local content and is designed to reach you in a relevant, interesting and sometimes uplifting manner.

Another reason I am thrilled to be living in Williamsburg is that I think I was coming close to losing my mind making that trip from Chesapeake to Williamsburg and back! Day after day I made the journey to Williamsburg, often in bumper to bumper traffic, hoping at least one of the tunnels was free and clear from a fender bender as I made my trek. On a good day I could make the trip in an hour and fifteen minutes one way. On a bad day - well, there have been days during the summer that have taken me two and a half hours to get back to Chesapeake.

But above all else, we are happy to be living here because Williamsburg is a wonderful community and a great place to meet new "next door neighbors"!

There is a second bit of good news that I also hope you have discovered by now. *Next Door Neighbors* is taking a step up in the level of quality we are bringing to you each month. With this issue on Education, we have increased the weight of the paper to give *Next Door Neighbors* more of a magazine feel. We have made some design changes to create a more upscale look while still serving our advertisers well. Most magazines will provide several pages of editorial content followed by several pages of advertisements stacked on top of one another. We are trying to give both readers and businesses our best and we believe we can create the right reading environment without pushing all of the paid advertising to a few pages. After all, it is the advertisers who are paying for the printing, postage, and other expenses to enable you to receive the magazine each month.

Meredith Collins, Publisher



Lastly, I have been fortunate to gain the expertise of some true photography and design professionals who are working with me to elevate the look of *Next Door Neighbors*. Williamsburg's Monica Sigmon, and Los Angeles based, Michael Taylor, are acting as consultants to *Next Door Neighbors* to help give you a better magazine each and every month. Monica is shooting the cover photos and working with me hands-on as a design consultant. I am honored to have their input and I hope you will see the results of all of our work in this issue and those yet to come. **NDN**

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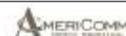
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BUILDING THE FUTURE

Williamsburg students share insights into their journeys in education

By Linda Landreth Phelps

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, as the old saying goes. Napoleon Hill, an early 20th-century proponent of positive thinking, urged people to “Cherish your vision and your dreams, as they are the children of your soul, the blueprints of your ultimate achievements. Become the architect of your destiny, capable of building a lifetime of accomplishment.” All good architects begin with a sound design and build on a solid foundation, and when it comes to your future, that foundation begins with education.

Our visions and dreams are formed as we grow. If we are fortunate, they will be carefully nurtured and gently molded by parents and teachers who will guide us along the way. Joshua Abelard is a brilliant young man who at 17 is already a rising junior at William & Mary, majoring in chemistry. His dream is to be a scientist or engineer. He was homeschooled all of his life, and says that he attributes his success to involved, supportive parents and the advantages of homeschooling.

“My parents and I made the decision about where

to go to college together. They essentially served as my coaches. We liked W&M’s academic reputation and knew I would be given the opportunity to learn a lot during my four years there.” There is the added advantage for a student as young as he was when accepted into W&M of being right here in town, close to home.

“Homeschooling allowed me to learn at my own pace without being held back or pushed too quickly,” he continued. “I could continue to the next level immediately after finishing a course without waiting for the next semester. Courses that gave me trouble were extended as necessary until I understood it fully. Best of all, being taught at home led me to love learning for its own sake. The emphasis was on gaining knowledge, not just making high grades - but I was also able to get excellent scores on my tests because I knew the subject well.”

Although now attending a public school, homeschooling has

also influenced Sydney Giblin, a senior at Jamestown High School (JHS), in a positive way. Sydney is literally reaching for the stars. Her ambition isn’t confined to the earth; she wants to explore space as an astronaut. At 17, she has her vision firmly in place and is building her education around that ambition.

“I would just LOVE to be an astronaut!” Sydney says. “Maybe some day I’ll be lucky enough to be chosen.”

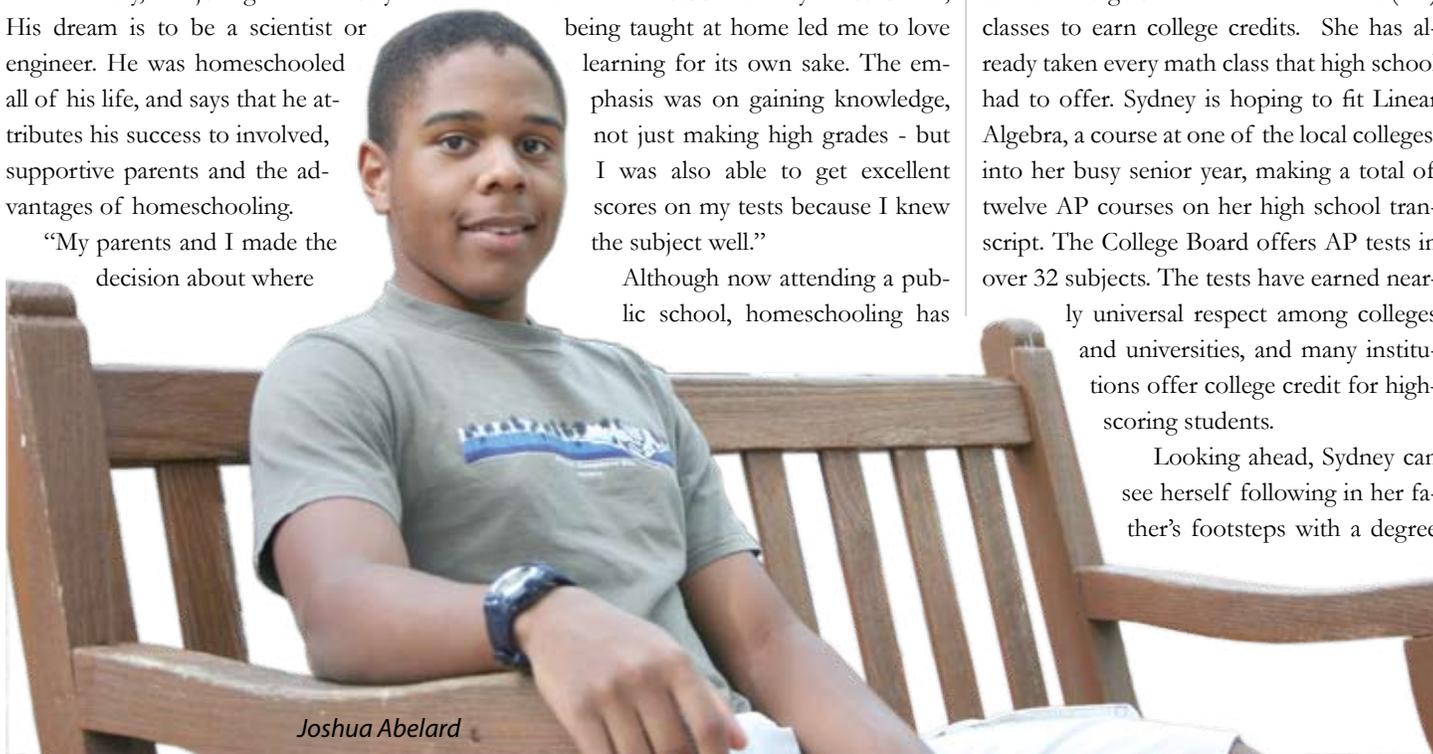
Luck may be a factor, but the proper preparation is even more important. Syd-

ney was taught at home through her middle school years, and then moved on to JHS to take advantage of Advanced Placement (AP) classes to earn college credits. She has already taken every math class that high school had to offer. Sydney is hoping to fit Linear Algebra, a course at one of the local colleges, into her busy senior year, making a total of twelve AP courses on her high school transcript. The College Board offers AP tests in over 32 subjects. The tests have earned nearly universal respect among colleges and universities, and many institutions offer college credit for high-scoring students.

Looking ahead, Sydney can see herself following in her father’s footsteps with a degree

Being taught at home led me to love learning for its own sake.

- Joshua Abelard



Joshua Abelard

in aerospace engineering, then pursuing a graduate degree and getting a job with Lockheed Martin, Boeing, or perhaps NASA, with a concentration in space exploration.

As a senior, Sydney admits to being just a bit stressed about admission to the school of her choice, but her anticipation of college is palpable.

"I'm mostly just excited - not too many worries now," she says. "I'm sure when it comes, I'll be more scared. College will be harder than high school, plus I'll have to stay focused with all the new freedoms of college."

Sydney is an unusually articulate and mature teenager, and if she stays as focused as she is right now, her future looks limitless.

In life, the brightest students and highest achievers are the squeaky wheels - they get a lot of "grease", educational and otherwise. Smart people know that investing in a little lubrication early on will make an enormous difference in the future.

Not all college students are teenagers; some put their dreams on hold, only to rekindle them later. Deena Walls, 34, could easily qualify as the poster girl for continuing education. (See cover photo.) She had her first baby at 16, graduated at 17, and was married two weeks later. It was a marriage that didn't last, and she eventually found herself a single mom of three children. After struggling to support her children alone for years, she thought she had finally found the man of her dreams. That dream turned into an ugly nightmare just five

months after the wedding. She was expecting her fourth baby when her marriage ended once again leaving her as the sole provider... but now for four children.

"I found work where I could - two or three minimum wage jobs at a time sometimes, driving a forklift, working in management in a Dunkin' Donuts, eventually establishing



Sydney Giblin, a senior, was homeschooled when she was younger and now attends public school at Jamestown High School.

a house cleaning business of my own," she says. "I became a Christian and wound up giving that business to a friend when I felt the call to minister to those in need. For the last eight years I've been serving at Grove Christian Outreach Center as the Assistant Director. I'm a self-supported missionary - meaning individuals and churches who believe in what God is doing at Grove provide for our financial needs."

Deena is very intelligent and loves to write, but felt hobbled by her lack of knowledge

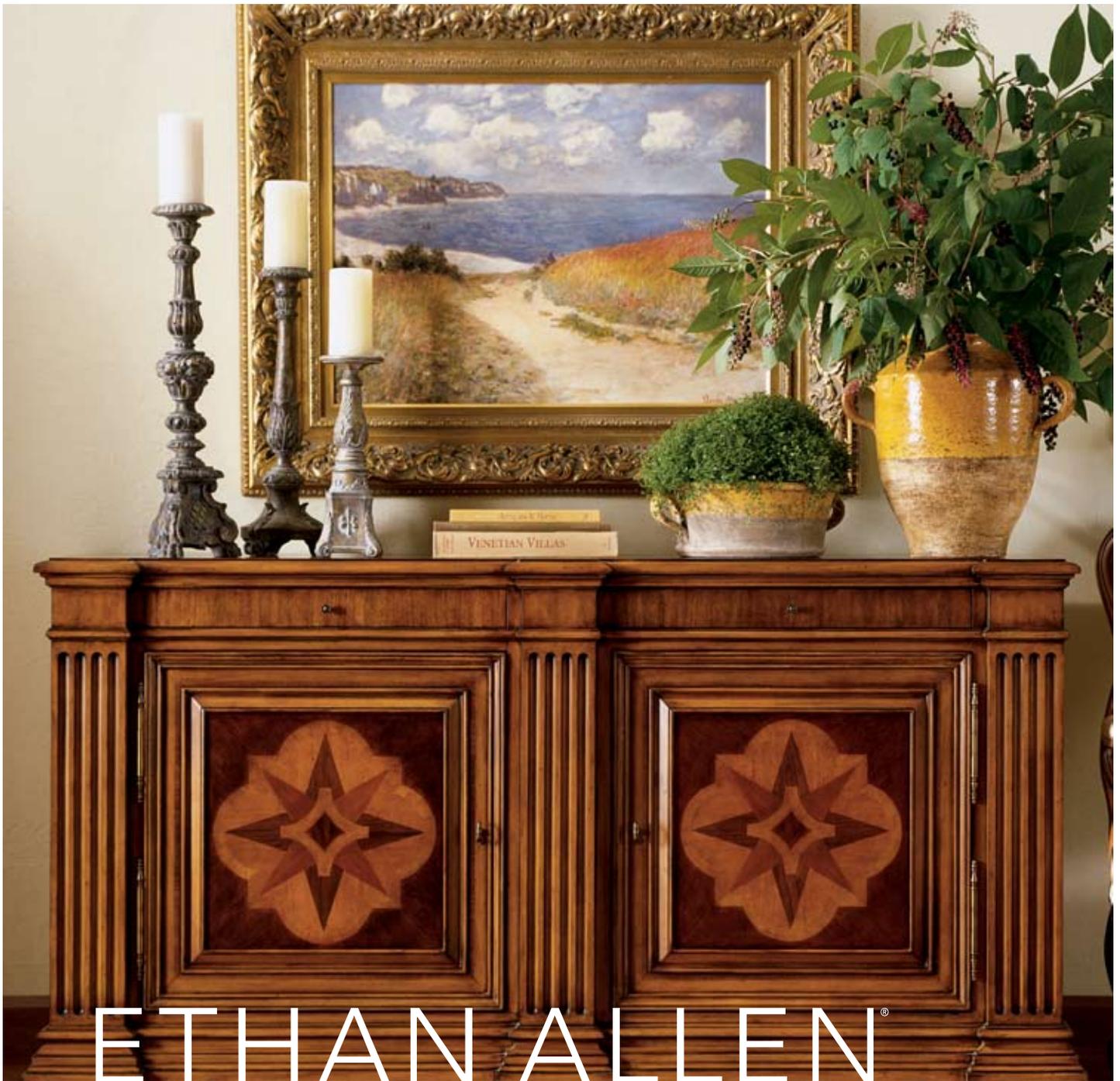
of things such as proper grammar. She's now hungry for the formal education that she didn't get when she was younger.

"A dear friend encouraged me to go to Thomas Nelson and take the aptitude test," she explains. "I did great, and signed up for classes on the spot. I wasn't much of a student in high school - I wanted to graduate, but that was it. Now I'm taking things I'm passionately interested in, such as Substance Abuse and other counseling courses, and working towards my Associate of Applied Science degree in Human Services/Public Relations. Once my older kids are grown and I have more time, I may want to be a parole officer. I'm taking 13 credits next semester, almost doubling the total credits I have. It's so different now - I was really mad at myself when I got a "B" last semester and blew my 4.0 GPA!"

Taking time away from her kids, now 17, 14, 12, and 3, to attend class and study is a sacrifice for the entire family, but seeing their mom pursue her education is an encouragement to them as well.

"I think I'm giving them a good example to follow," Deena says. "They're really proud of me, and now my daughter, Destiny, is a senior and will be going to college next year. My son is more motivated now, too. He had no aspirations for higher education at all, but now he wants to go to a trade school for heating and air conditioning maintenance or to be an electrician." Education is not only expanding Deena's horizons, but her contagious enthusiasm for learning inspires her children to set higher goals for themselves, too.

Like Joshua, Sydney, and Deena, each of us has our own vision and dream, the blueprint that will decide the shape of our society's future. It's been said that education is the means of transmitting civilization; in reality, it's even more than that. Education is nothing less than the raw material essential for its ongoing renovation. NDN

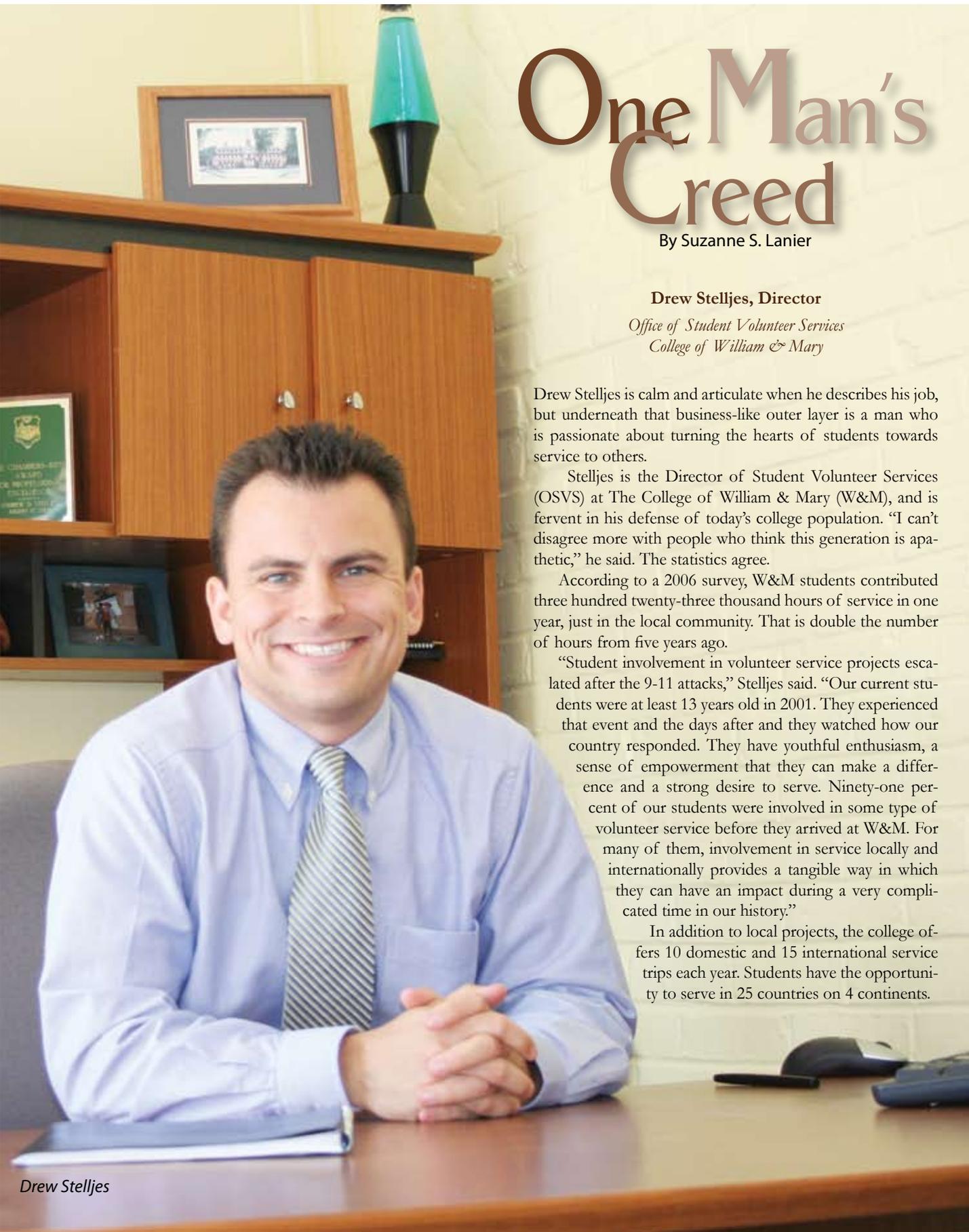


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One Man's Creed

By Suzanne S. Lanier

Drew Stelljes, Director

*Office of Student Volunteer Services
College of William & Mary*

Drew Stelljes is calm and articulate when he describes his job, but underneath that business-like outer layer is a man who is passionate about turning the hearts of students towards service to others.

Stelljes is the Director of Student Volunteer Services (OSVS) at The College of William & Mary (W&M), and is fervent in his defense of today's college population. "I can't disagree more with people who think this generation is apathetic," he said. The statistics agree.

According to a 2006 survey, W&M students contributed three hundred twenty-three thousand hours of service in one year, just in the local community. That is double the number of hours from five years ago.

"Student involvement in volunteer service projects escalated after the 9-11 attacks," Stelljes said. "Our current students were at least 13 years old in 2001. They experienced that event and the days after and they watched how our country responded. They have youthful enthusiasm, a sense of empowerment that they can make a difference and a strong desire to serve. Ninety-one percent of our students were involved in some type of volunteer service before they arrived at W&M. For many of them, involvement in service locally and internationally provides a tangible way in which they can have an impact during a very complicated time in our history."

In addition to local projects, the college offers 10 domestic and 15 international service trips each year. Students have the opportunity to serve in 25 countries on 4 continents.

Drew Stelljes

“Over 1000 students applied for 250 spots for last year’s spring break service trips,” Steljjes said. He heard that some students planned to camp out the night before administration would accept applications in order to be near the front of the line. “A coworker and I arrived about 6 AM with coffee and doughnuts expecting to have to step over lumpy sleeping bags to get to our offices. Instead, the sidewalks were unobstructed. We found a note on the door that said, ‘Dear W&M student services - We found a way to get in. We’re inside. Love, The Line.’”

We walked into the building to find a large group of students and sleeping bags, blankets and pillows strewn all around,” he continued. “Some were still sleeping; some just waking and disheveled. They were all waiting just to apply, with the hope of being chosen as a member of a team that would provide medical relief, housing, community outreach and education to people around the globe. These are not students who are uninvolved or disinterested in world affairs.”

Steljjes first became interested in volunteer service as a student himself at James Madison University (JMU), where he received Masters’ degrees in Counseling Psychology and Student Development. His first volunteer trip was an

environmental service trip about twelve years ago, and he continued to volunteer as a tutor at a retirement center until he left JMU. He accepted a position in the Office of Student Volunteer Services at W&M in 1999 and has since added a PhD in Education to his achievements. It is not just his job. He is immersed in a spirit of service.

In May 2002, Steljjes accompanied a group of W&M students to Reynosa, Mexico on his first international service trip, which he said was also the most memorable.

“Amidst harsh conditions, there existed so much hope, happiness, energy and laughter,” he recounted. “The community members we were supposed to help welcomed us with open arms, shared their lives, their homes and their love of life with us. They had so very little material goods, but they were rich – in faith, in spirit, in love. We walked along littered dirt roads laughing, talking, sometimes singing, learning about one another and recognizing similarities rather than seeking differences. Several community leaders worked beside us and taught us, and we built a 300 sq. ft. cinder block house for a young family whose life

seemed all too similar to my own. Their family consisted of two young children, a boy and a girl, a devoted father and husband and a kind-hearted, loving, passionate mother and wife. Both parents hoped for a better life for their children and worked tirelessly to provide for them. That family was happier to have a 300 sq. ft. house than some people I know who have a 3,000 sq. ft. house. I left feeling energized and hopeful with an intense desire to help hundreds more have a similar experience.”

There is another job that must be completed before the first duffle bag is packed. “Unlike other universities with multimillion dollar budgets that support volunteer service trips, W&M students raise their own funds,” Steljjes said. “They wash cars, they seek sponsors... they will raise as much money as it takes to make a friend in a village in Kenya. (That trip costs over \$2000 per student. Others cost as little as \$850.)

The big fundraiser for the Office of Volunteer Services is a silent/live auction dubbed “Bidding for Hope” which has historically

- continued on page 11

“I can’t disagree more with people who think this generation is apathetic.”

- Drew Steljjes



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The Big Leap!

Moving towards the future
with a strong heart an open chute

By Linda Landreth Phelps

“**T**he Future” looms large for those young people who are preparing to enter into it. It’s a big leap into adulthood and self-sufficiency, and it might feel to them the same way as taking that final step into insubstantial air for a first-time skydiver. Questions may swirl in their heads - Do I want to go to college or would a trade or the military be better? If college, which one? Are my grades good enough to be accepted to the school I want, and can I afford it? Did I take the right courses and have enough extracurricular activities? What if my chute doesn’t open?

It can be a scary time for young adults, a time which most of us already safely on the ground can look back on with the luxury of

hindsight. With all these questions unanswered for them, the trepidation factor can be daunting. However, there exists an enormous support system of people whose jobs are to help students discover their interests,

set goals, and steer them towards the decisions which will prepare them for making those career aspirations possible. After all, skydivers aren’t shoved out of a plane without the benefit of ground school.



Bob Nilson, a counselor at Jamestown High School, helps students work on a four year plan.

The schools in the Williamsburg/James City County area, both public and private, do a terrific job of helping young people through this process with their excellent guidance and counseling system. Each student is assigned their own personal counselor whose job is to point them towards the possible while they reach for the limit of their imaginations.

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Bob Nilson, a long-time counselor at Jamestown High School, says, "All kids have the same counselor for their entire high school experience, so we really try to get to know them. We work on their four-year plan every year, fine-tuning as we go along. I try to get them to stretch and take risks and remind them that they need to 'Consider the turtle - it never makes progress until it sticks its neck out!'"

At New Horizons Regional Education Center, the objective is to provide comprehensive career and technical training for youth and adults; it's a place where they can acquire skills that are needed in today's job market. As part of this, a great enrichment prospect is offered Williamsburg's most gifted students. The New Horizons Governor's School for Science and Technology (NHGS) offers a part-time accelerated curriculum and mentorship program designed to promote interest in and develop research skills related to science, mathematics, and technology. Mentoring on a one-on-one basis is an

important part of this philosophy.

Not everyone has the desire, the grades, or the financial means to attend a traditional, four-year college to prepare them for their future. For these individuals there is a wealth of opportunity within the system for anyone who is motivated to seize it.

At the new Warhill High School (WHS), a nearly 243,000 square foot facility opening this fall in Williamsburg, students will have the opportunity to meet with a career coach as well as a counselor, and will have access to a career room for further exploration. Through partnership with Sentara and Thomas Nelson Community College, they'll be able to offer instruction to all James City County students in "career clusters" such as: Health, Human and Public Services; Electronics, Engineering

and Scientific Technology, and Information Technology and Communication. Each student will still have a "home" school, but stu-

dents from Jamestown, Lafayette, and Warhill high schools will all be eligible to attend the new Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses at Warhill.

Dr. Karen Kolet, the principal of WHS, says, "We are committed to making our students aware that school

"We are committed to making our students aware that school is not the end of their journey; it should be the wheels to take them there."

- Dr. Karen Kolet

is not the end of their journey; it should be the wheels to take them there." She also believes that one of the best "deals" in career planning is for a student to take two years of community college and transfer credits to a four-year school if they choose to continue. "The bottom line is not what school a student graduates from, but that they DO graduate, and have an employable skill when

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they do. Too many students (50% of those who go) do not finish college. All too often they return to their parents' homes with debt and no employable skill."

Within the individual schools themselves, career planning will mirror the nature of the institution. Walsingham Academy, a private Catholic school in Williamsburg celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, promotes that due to their rigorous college-prep curriculum, "virtually every Walsingham Academy graduate attends a four year college or university following commencement."

Williamsburg Christian Academy (WCA) is also a college-prep school which is able to give students a lot of individualized guidance due to their smaller class size. Their mission statement reflects their faith-based educational emphasis. WCA's logo features an eagle; appropriately, their motto is "Teaching Them to Fly."

What if a student wants to be admitted to a great college but feels like he needs an edge in order to increase his chances? A higher SAT/ACT score can lead to acceptance to better schools as well as potential scholarships. There are a variety of test-prep books, videos, software, group and online courses out there, but for the personal touch, both Sylvan and Huntington Learning Centers offer one-on-one, customized instruction. Every student begins with a diagnostic assessment which identifies areas of weakness, and a program tailored to his or her needs is created. Students practice by taking actual ACT exams to ensure that they're mastering the material and improving their test-taking skills. For those whose fundamental skills need buffing, tutoring in targeted areas is also available, but knowledge and application of test-taking strategies alone can lead to significant improvement in scores.

Karen Constantine is a private coach who, among others, helps students struggling with issues such as ADD get accepted into their top choice schools. She says, "Schools look at far more than the SAT or ACT scores. I help students focus on every aspect of their application - academics, sports, leadership,

music, or whatever - as if it were the only criteria by which they will be judged. Most colleges require very specific essays as part of their application requirements, and I tell my students to give them what they're looking for: warmth, sincerity, and honesty. They want to like you!"

With all the different programs geared toward preparation for the future, there is no reason for anyone to graduate from high

school without the potential to become a self-sufficient, contributing member of society. Or in other words... a success.

Those of you who are about to make that big leap into the future take heart; there's no need for nail-biting and shaky knees. With the right preparation and skillful people "packing your chute", you can step out and make your jump with confidence - you're sure to have a safe landing! NDN



Dr. Karen Kolet is the principal of Warhill High School and supports career planning to help students have more successful futures.

- continued from page 7

raised around \$20,000. All of that money goes towards student expenses for service trips. One of the auction items is tango lessons with actor Robert Duvall and his wife at their Northern Virginia home," he said.

Even though there are no college funds to support student trips, Stelljes said that President Nichol is wholly committed. "He accompanied a group of students on a trip to the Dominican Republic over winter break in 2006, and worked along with the students providing medical relief to residents. He also did some research on interviewing patients to help us get more thorough and accurate information," Stelljes said.

Stelljes is both proud and solicitous of his students. "Sometimes the kids come back shocked by the atrocities they find in some areas of the United States. Most people think that the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. is over," he said. "One of our volunteers was so grieved that he spent his summer studying civil rights inequities in Syria, and is considering a career in international civil rights."¹

Some of the volunteers become emotionally connected with the recipients of their service. One young woman volunteers at an orphanage in Romania and works with abandoned, malnourished infants. She struggles every time

she leaves the babies to come home, and has difficulty reconciling her two lives.²

"Some return to campus with an intense desire to study the causes for the need for service. But all the students report that service trips are life changing (or "life-charging"). They learn about themselves and about others. Stereotypes are shattered and ideas for positive change are spawned. They are transformed – their life perspectives, the way they live, the choices they make. They've developed an intense and deep commitment to service. They hear, they care and they advocate. They are the next leaders and they are learning an ethic of care that is being nurtured in impoverished areas and developing countries," he said.

As for Stelljes, his itinerary for the next year includes accompanying students on a medical relief trip to Belize in December/January, teaching a class on the US response to hurricane Katrina and a work trip to New Orleans in the spring. He will then go back to Reynosa.

It's very difficult to recognize where the Director of the Office of Student Volunteer Services ends and the heart of a man takes over. NDN

1 see www.wm.edu/news/index.php?id=5144

2 see www.wm.edu/news/index.php?id=7986

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Ward Ellis

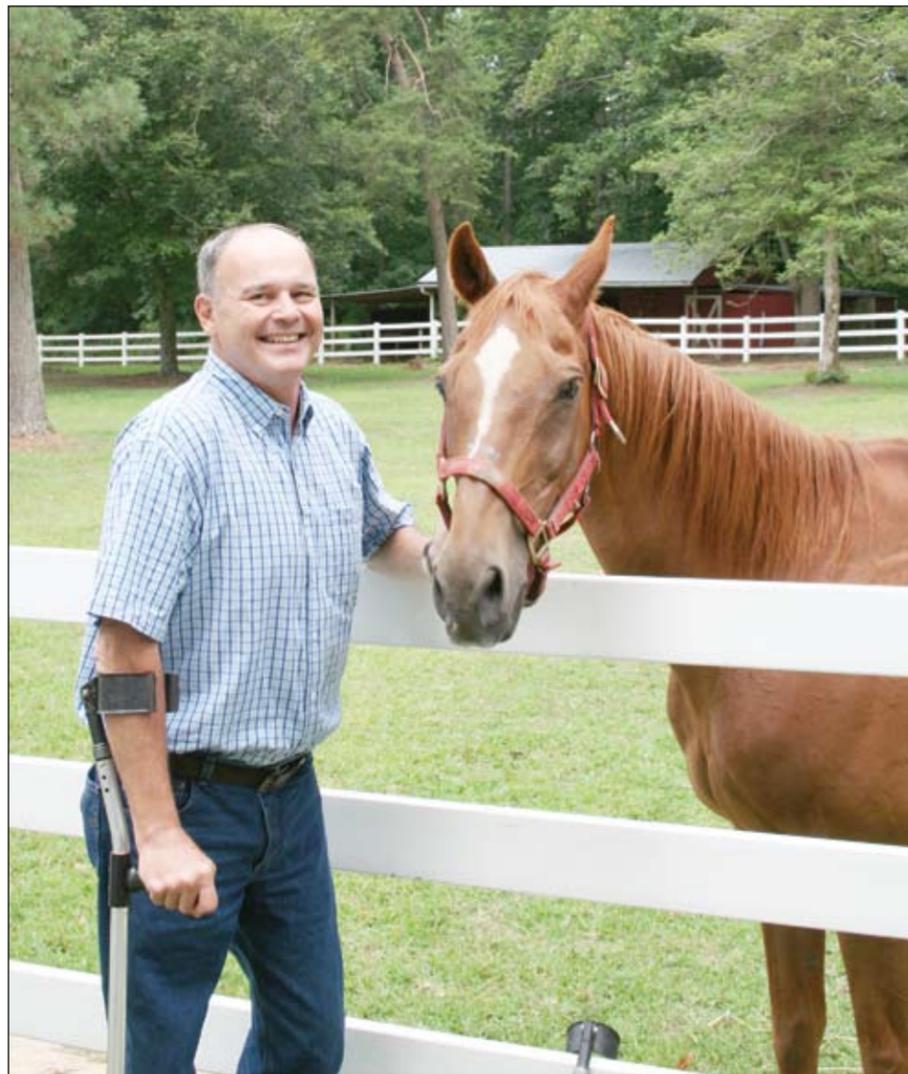
2007 MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

By Meredith Collins

I met with Ward Ellis at his home to get a sense of who he is, not only as a teacher but as a person. His home was comfortable and inviting. It was nestled next to large trees on 10 acres of land in the Toano area with an abun-

dance of fresh air, plenty of shade and very suitable accommodations for horses, a passion both he and his wife, Geri, share.

Ward was given the honor of 2007 Teacher of the Year as Toano Middle School's physical science instructor. Dr. Gary Mathews,



Superintendent of W-JCC Schools, defined how a teacher can be given this special honor. "We are recognizing those who, according to their peers, students and others in the community, have gone the extra mile in creativity, community service, caring, or a combination of all of these," he explained. "They have consistently demonstrated effort and passion far above the norm – the kind that our students and their colleagues will remember for years to come because of their student empathy, guidance and instructional expertise."

I thought back to the teachers who had made a difference in my own life and wondered if Ward would be like any of them. What is it that makes some teachers better than others? Is it knowledge, style or is it that certain teachers connect with some students differently than others? If I could turn back the hands of time and become an 8th grader once more, would I be able to relate to Ward as an adult teacher, coach or mentor?

We began the interview with Ward telling me about his background. He relaxed in his chair and talked about what it was like to be an Army brat never staying in any one place for long. His father was in the Army Corp of Engineers and growing up he moved 23 times in 20 years. When he finished high school, Ward attended William & Mary and earned an undergraduate degree in Topical Science, a combination of mathematics and science courses. He also attained a Masters in Education with a specialization in Biology.

Ward began teaching in Williamsburg soon after his graduation. "I started off teaching an introductory physical science for two years," Ward said. "I started off at Berkley which was then a junior high school. Then I taught two years of biology at the

high school." He also spent some of his early teaching days coaching both football and wrestling. These were sports he had first-hand knowledge of from his former William & Mary football and a heavy weight wrestling experiences. Ward's face lit up with enthusiasm as he talked about his own experiences playing football and wrestling. At 6'2" and 212 lbs., he made a strong defensive end for the local college. He played under coaches like Marv Levy, Lou Holtz, Bobby Ross and others – many who hit the big time in the NFL. "I had some really good coaches," Ward commented. "I loved playing football."

He harnessed his love for sports as a football and wrestling coach during his initial years as a teacher. Within a few years, however, an industrious Ward made a transition into administration. At that time, you could not hold a paid coaching position if you worked in administration so Ward kept his involvement in coaching for a few more years without pay.

"I became Assistant Principal at James Blair for about five or six years, and then I went to Lafayette and I was an Assistant Principal there for about five years," he explained "And then I became Principal at Lafayette for 10 years."

But even as an administrator, Ward found ways to connect with students. While he was Assistant Principal at James Blair, the kids from the high school came out and wired his house for him while it was under construction. He had been their teacher in the electric class before moving into his new position and was confident they could do the job right.

"They designed the blueprints, they got the materials, they figured out how much wire was needed and came out and drilled the holes and wired it up," he explained. "They passed inspection with a blue ribbon," he added, with a smile.

However, after two decades of working

in an administrative setting, Ward began to think about getting back into the classroom. Over the years, he had considered other jobs as most people do from time to time, and while he knew he could do other things to make more money he liked teaching because it gave him the opportunity to be stimulated and to problem solve. While there were many factors Ward considered he decided to leave administration and go back into teaching, there was one dominant motivation. "I



Ward is popular with his students and his horse is pretty fond of him too.

wanted to be where the kids are and where the rubber meets the road," he emphasized.

Ward is back home again with his 8th graders, teaching them physical science. He is doing what he loves. He moves physically at a slower pace because of some health issues resulting from operations to remove tumors in his spinal chord, but his passion for his work keeps his heart and mind tuned in to his life's work in the same way it was when he started teaching 36 years ago. While the summer gives him time to garden, keep up his beautiful home and travel with Geri, it also gives him time to reflect and anticipate a new year.

A great number of students come back to visit Ward. Some are in college. Some are well on their way in life. Ward remembers one student's call that really made an impact on him. "I had a student call me from Massachusetts," Ward said thinking back. "He

called and said that I had spoken to him one day about an issue that he had with his girlfriend and since that time he'd been in a car accident and had paralysis. He had a strange tone in his voice that made me concerned about what he intended to do. He was tying up loose ends. I called the police department up in New England and told them I had some grave concerns about this student doing harm to himself. The comments he had said to me...I had no idea that they had

meant that much to him and that he would call just to say 'thanks'. You never know what kind of impact you make when you are talking to young people."

Ward's teaching style is his own but he has made himself a student of sorts by observing what other teachers do well. "I steal from other teachers when they have a good lesson," he admitted. "I like to visit other teacher's classes just to see what's going on – what kind of techniques or approaches are being used. Everybody's got their own style and there are

some things certainly worth emulating."

I couldn't help think that there certainly must be other teachers emulating him, and I was not surprised when he also told me how excited he was to be back into teaching. "I'm motivated when my feet hit the floor to go to school," Ward said. "I miss the kids. It's what's happening in the classroom that excites me."

I believed him. Honesty and openness are certainly something young kids relate to and value, and they can sniff out something fake in a minute. I, too, appreciated that about Ward and I knew I had the answer to my question. Yes, if I could turn back the hands of time and be an 8th grader once more, I believe I could relate to Ward as my teacher. In fact, I'm willing to bet he'd even be one of my favorites. NDN

Richard Ambler

2007 HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

By Meredith Collins

Richard Ambler was selected 2007 Teacher of the Year on the high school level, like Ward Ellis his counterpart at the middle school level. I'm sure no one who knows him was surprised, especially not his mother.

Richard comes from a family of teachers. He was raised in Amherst County and surrounded by teachers. His mother taught

in Amherst County Schools. His father was a teacher at Dunbar Middle School in Lynchburg and also served as an Episcopal Minister. During the week Richard was around school teachers in the classroom and Friday night they came to his home.

"Once a week my family would have what's called "Ambler Night," Richard explained. "Every Friday night you just invite a bunch of friends over to the house and everyone brings something.



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It was just a social activity. Most of the adults who came were teachers.”

Despite his exposure to the teaching profession, Richard did not think he would become a teacher. He even placed a bet with his mother that he would not enter into the teaching field. But she knew differently.

“I saw how hard they worked,” Richard recounted. “I saw them late at night grading. I said early on ‘I’m never going to be a teacher.’”

When he finished high school, he attended William & Mary, just as his grandfather, older brother and first cousin had done. He liked the idea of attending a college a few hours away from home where he could assert some independence while staying in-state where his education would be more affordable. He earned his degree in history and upon graduation worked in sales for S&K men’s clothing store.

This is the job for me because you work with people. You feel like you are doing something useful. You are contributing to society.

“I didn’t like it,” he said. “I needed daily interaction with people of a positive nature. Sales is not always of a positive nature. It’s on weekends and holidays when you want to be with your family. Plus, if you do well one week then they say ‘Oh, you can do better the next week’. So there is always an upping of the amount you have to sell. It’s tough.”

After a year and a half of sales, Richard went back to school to get his teaching certificate. “To no surprise to my mother,” he said, with a smile.

From that time on, Richard was in his element doing perhaps what he was destined to do. He taught for three years in out of state schools before coming back to the area with his wife, Ginger, who took a position as an assistant to Sam Sadler, Vice President of Student Affairs at William & Mary.

That was 16 years ago and he has never

questioned his decision to teach in Williamsburg. In the summers he takes care of his kids and any number of other kids from the neighborhood while his wife works. The rest of the year he devotes to his students and family.

“This is the job for me because you work with people,” Richard explained. “You feel like you are doing something useful. You are contributing to society. You have wonderful vacations. You are on your children’s schedule and that’s important because my wife can go to work and I can be with them in the summer.”

Richard has been at Jamestown High School since it opened. He teaches senior government and advanced placement microeconomics, which very few high schools offer. It’s an elective, so the students who sign up for his class have a choice regarding whether they want to take his course or not.

“There is this sense that success breeds success,” he said. “The students talk to the next students and say, ‘You have to have so-and-so’. I think for any successful teacher,

The advertisement features a large background image of Frank and Laura Rosalie, owners of Fitness Together on Longhill Road in Williamsburg. They are standing in front of a promotional banner for the fitness center. The banner includes the text "Reach Your Fitness Goals Now at Fitness Together Williamsburg" and "Benefits of the Fitness Together System". The banner also lists several benefits: Accountability, Motivation, Results, and Personalized Programs. The Fitness Together logo is prominently displayed in the center of the banner. Below the banner, there is a white text box with the headline "NEXT DOOR NEIGHBORS THE WAY BUYERS AND SELLERS CONNECT" and a testimonial from Frank and Laura Rosalie. The testimonial states: "Next Door Neighbors reaches an audience that may not otherwise be reached by other media. Meredith is just wonderful to work with. We're very happy to be a part of this publication." followed by the signature "- Frank & Laura Rosalie".

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- Frank & Laura Rosalie

Frank and Laura are owners of Fitness Together on Longhill Road in Williamsburg.

being fair, staying focused on what you need to do that day, not letting the little things get in the way. I think those are they keys.”

Richard is very complimentary of teachers who are in the lower grades because he recognizes they teach the students many fundamentals that do not come to play in his classes. “Teachers of seniors really owe a huge debt of gratitude to 9th grade teachers,” he elaborated. “Because 9th grade teachers take them and train them on how to write a paper, how to be organized, how to study and I get them three years later. I don’t deal with the dating crises, the immaturity, and the ‘Well, I don’t know how to take notes’ so I feel very spoiled by the 9th grade teachers because I have these young adults who are about to go out into the world and my job is very different. Mine is to get them ready for that world by showing them that there are two sides to almost everything.”

As a government teacher, Richard is creative in the classroom. He has turned his classroom into the floor of the U.S House of Representatives and conducted mock elections for local, state and national candidates. He encourages his students to be open-minded thinkers.

“Government doesn’t necessarily have answers,” Richard said. “It has responses. A president can only serve two terms – that’s a fact. Should a president be able to serve more if he’s really good? That’s a discussion. That’s what government is. It’s cool because there are no right or wrong answers. There’s a lot of gray. So I promise my students at the end of the year I will have them more confused than when they started. And then they’ll understand life is not quite so clear.”

Richard’s approach to teaching is very practical: affect change where you can, don’t sweat the small stuff and control what you can control. Where did he learn this style? Perhaps he learned this from his own experiences teaching. Or maybe he learned it from the many hours he spent in the company of teachers at home and during “Ambler Nights” which by the way, still continue each week at his retired parent’s home in Williamsburg. Or maybe it’s just in his genes.

I bet his mother knows. NDN



PUBLISHER’S NOTE

The Elementary Schools Teacher of the Year for 2007 is Michael Hurley. Next Door Neighbors was unable to reach him for an interview; hopefully he was enjoying his well deserved time off during the summer in preparation for the new school year.

Michael is Matthew Whaley’s 4th Grade team leader and has been teaching for W-JCC since 1995. He earned his teaching certificate from Christopher Newport University and his master’s degree from the College of William & Mary. Please join us in recognizing his contributions to the area’s youth and for his outstanding work as a teacher.

- Meredith Collins

Look for these upcoming issues of Next Door Neighbors

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DR. WILLIAM J. TRAVIS, ED. D

By Meredith Collins

There are some exciting times on the horizon for Thomas Nelson Community College in Williamsburg and Dr. William Travis is happy to be leading the way. No doubt you have read the newspaper articles or heard the news that in the spring of 2009, Thomas Nelson Community College will be welcoming students to its new campus. Or perhaps you have seen the beginning construction near Williamsburg Outlet Mall on Opportunity Way.

For many young people the opening of this new campus means the opportunity to take courses and further their education

in classes that have never been available to them in this area before. For Dr. Travis, or Bill as he likes to be called, it means he has the opportunity to take the experience he has gained in education over the years and merge it with the specific needs of the area to put together classes and programs that are the right fit for Williamsburg.

When he was a young man in college and later in the Air Force, doors in education opened for him and he did not hesitate to step through them. "I always knew I would enjoy teaching," Bill explained. "And I had an opportunity way back when I was finish-

ing my bachelor's degree, when I was a senior, to do a couple of lab courses at Ohio State. They would hire you as a lab assistant and I enjoyed that. Sometime later I had an opportunity and started teaching as an adjunct instructor. Actually it happened in this area here when I was at Langley and my first adjunct classes were for Embry-Riddle up at Fort Eustis. As I did that more I really realized I enjoyed it. That was fun."

Bill spent 22 years in the Air Force as an aircraft maintenance supervisor, a maintenance squadron commander and a chief of maintenance. He finished his military ca-

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reer as a Lieutenant Colonel before making education his full-time focus. He enjoyed the service but he tended to gravitate toward education when opportunities came his way.

"It wasn't something I could tell you had been planned all of my life," Bill said with some thought. "Back when I was in college I don't think I would ever thought I'd be in this business."

His love for education that began to evolve during his military career stayed with him and he became involved with education whenever he could. When Bill was preparing himself to retire from the Air Force he was also working for Commonwealth College in Hampton.

"I was teaching some classes at night and they knew I was retiring and they offered me a position to work with them which was half teaching and half administration," he said. "And I took that. I worked for them for a number of years and I enjoyed that and kind of

expanded it. I realized I enjoyed the administrative side as well and that's kind of how I got into an administrative position in higher education."

Later, Bill spent time at Johnson & Wales University in Norfolk, VA and then began working for Thomas Nelson Community College. Now as Provost in Williamsburg, he is making plans to lay down an appropriate foundation for the larger Williamsburg school to build upon. One of the main areas of concentration he currently has on his plate is to assess the needs of the Williamsburg community to plan and implement courses and programs that are the right fit for this area. To do this, he is asking locals for help and he's surveying the community for input.

"It's not so much a formal survey as I've been out speaking with numbers of groups," he clarified. "One of the things I have been asking folks to do is help me in forming what I'm calling a small campus advisory committee. It's not like our local board that advises our president on overall college matters. But these are community connections, individuals who have some interest, who will help us to sit down very informally, quite frankly probably informally by email as much as face to face – but to bring some perspective in as to what it is the community really wants us to be able to provide."

Thomas Nelson Commu-

nity College has demonstrated its willingness to partner with the community on other occasions. Most recently, they worked with the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Alliance to create and implement the *Prepare, Care, Share Hospitality Program*. Now, they want to partner with locals to help develop the right kind of future for the families who live in the Williamsburg area.

"It would be wrong for Thomas Nelson to say 'here is what you need so here is what we're going to develop,'" Bill said. "That's really backward in my opinion. We really need

We really need to work with the community and try to produce what the community needs.

- Bill Travis

to work with the community and try to produce what the community needs. When I talk about courses and those things I don't want it to be strictly

the credit program. People think of us as a credit program and what we teach here is mostly our credit work. But we do have a large workforce development department. We're going to have another workforce development representative up in this area, we hope very soon. And so we teach a lot of continuing education programs too and that's one of the areas we want to expand here."

In addition to developing the framework for courses and programs, Bill is also making sure that the dual enrollment program will continue to be a popular offering for high school students in the area. This program has recently shown tremendous growth and promises to continue to expand as more students will be served on the larger campus.

"Dual enrollment takes a couple of different forms," Bill commented. "There are cases where a high school student is physically taking a course on the community col-



lege campus at the same time. That person is a dual enrolled student. In some cases, they are using that college course to go back and count for high school credits as well. In some cases they are not. The other case, which is more predominant in our district, is where the student is taking a course at the high school that matches what the community college would teach, perhaps in an introductory level course. In that case the college works with the high school district and in some cases with the instructor, to make sure that they are in fact giving them the same material that we would be giving at the college level. If they do that, the student is dual enrolled at the high school and they get college credit for that as well.”

As Bill explains some of the ways Thomas Nelson Community College can serve its students, he keeps coming back to the students themselves. He plans to hold informal meetings with students, perhaps serving pizza and drinks, to interact and learn from them. He wants to gain an understanding of what is on the students’ minds and find out what kind of courses they want the community college to offer.

As he talks about getting to know more students you can tell that this truly interests

him. Bill is approachable and comfortable in his role, and his experience has taught him that he doesn’t have to have all the answers – that he can open his office doors and his ears to the ideas of others, including the very people who will be attending the community college to further their education.

And while developing the right kind of classes is imperative, it is very important for Bill to make sure he increases enrollment significantly. “One of the biggest challenges is we want to fill the school house,” Bill emphasized. “We served just over a thousand students here last spring through the Williamsburg campus. We would like to at least double that.”

But even with lofty goals such as this, Bill is undaunted. In fact, he is right at home with all of the challenges and opportunities that are a part of a growing educational system and a new campus.

“I like education,” Bill said with an earnest smile. “It is very enjoyable. This is fun. And this opportunity is fun. I don’t look at this as a big opportunity for me. I think this is an opportunity for the college to be a major part of the community.” NDN

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Making A Difference

THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM AT WORK AT JAMES RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By Muna Killingback

DR. DAVID GASTON is a big proponent of a teaching system that encourages students to learn about a world beyond the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs), and where children are encouraged to make connections between the subjects they learn. James River Elementary is unique among schools in the Williamsburg/James City County (WJCC) school district in this way. It is a recognized International Baccalaureate (IB) school, certified to implement the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP). The focus of the PYP program is the “development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom

and in the world outside” according to the Geneva-based International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), which oversees the program in more than 2,000 schools in 124 countries.

“The difference between IB and the other schools is the connectiveness of the curriculum,” Dr. Gaston explains. “We still teach the content of the Virginia SOLs. IB simply provides the framework and training. It is an approach to learning and teaching and provides a best practice example. But it is not a prescriptive program - it is wide open.”



Dr. David Gaston

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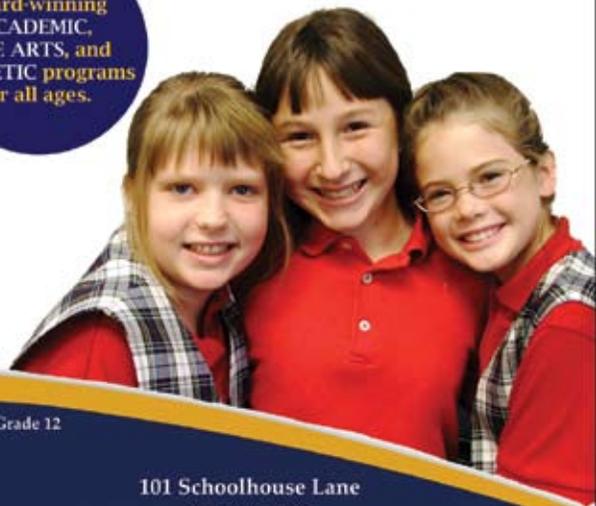
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Dr. Gaston has had extensive experience with the IB program in many different capacities. He has been trained as a coordinator for the high school IB diploma program and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the IBO, through which he has learned about successful educational programs worldwide. He has been the magnet school's principal for the past three years, but will be taking up a new post as principal of Berkeley Middle School this fall.

James River Elementary began instituting its International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program in 2002. Among other changes, foreign language study was introduced, with K-5 students receiving weekly instruction in Spanish. Last year, James River was officially certified as an IB school.

As he sits in his office at James River Elementary, Dr. Gaston speaks enthusiastically about the impact the IB program has had on school life and learning at James River Elementary. He emphasizes that parental support of the IB program is essential. "It

will work only if the community wants it," Dr. Gaston says. "The conditions have to be there - the parents have to be committed, the students have to be involved."

Teacher training is also a strong component of the IB program. All James River Elementary teachers have been trained in the IB method and approach. Emphasis is placed on continual professional development and ongoing training into specific areas as the IB inquiry method. "Based on these ideas, the teachers write the curriculum," Dr. Gaston continues. "Grade level teams are always working on this - it is a constant refinement process. Planning work is enormous, with a lot of collaboration and teamwork."

IB trainers are also sent to different regions to cross-train. The IB Coordinator of James River Elementary, Janet Parker, is now being trained in site and authorization visits, and eventually will become involved in consulting for schools in the process of gaining IB certification. She also represents James River Elementary at the IB Midatlantic Re-

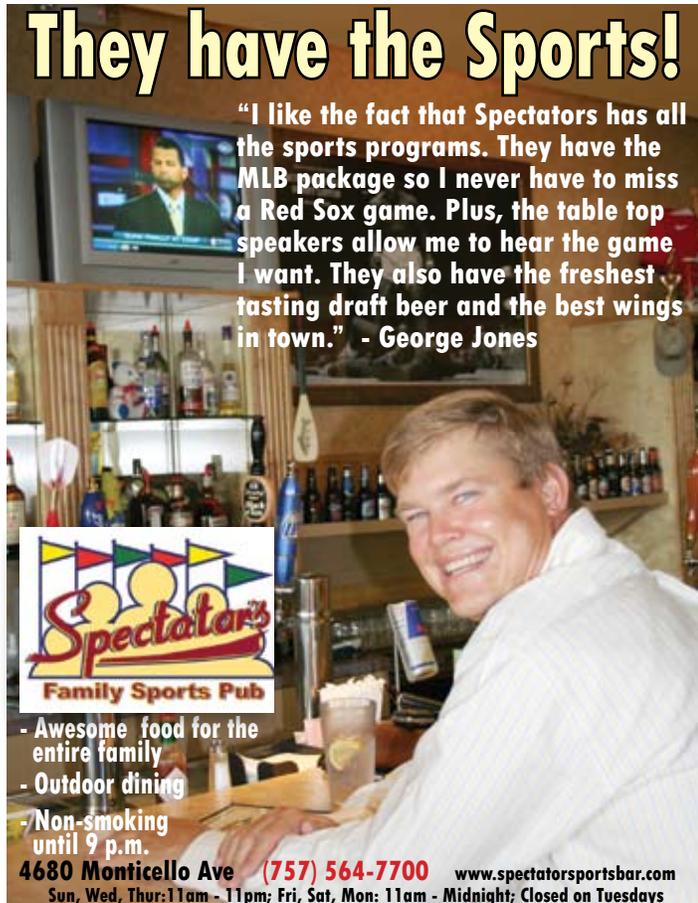
gional Consortium, which represents a growing network in which to share best practices and strategies.

Teachers also work together to formulate school policies. "We come up with essential agreements that become the cultural constitution of the school," Dr. Gaston explains. "This includes how we address each other, how we present the IB student profile, and model the student profile. We are modeling what a balanced individual looks like - through the curriculum and through us, in our interactions with each other. It is a lot of intensive work - but once you get through that, it becomes automatic, it becomes the way we do things."

While every school operates with a balance of policies and procedures, the IB model creates a sense of accountability across the board. What the IB program strives to achieve is depth, not wide coverage. "Actually," Dr. Gaston reflects, "These elements have to be present in any successful school. But the IB framework holds everybody's feet

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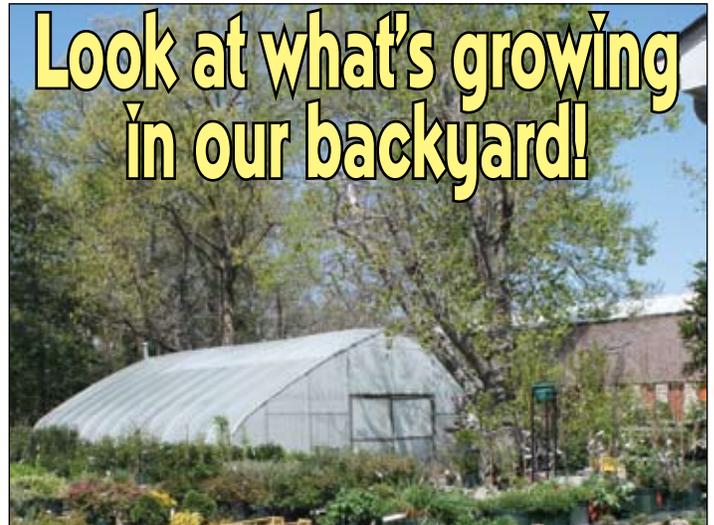


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to the fire: teachers, parents, students.”

The IB program is about getting students to direct their learning, giving them the chance to ask questions and then make the connections. “If they work in a subject over time, and have a long, meaningful connection to it, the kids will say, ‘I know it, I’ve experienced it,’” Dr. Gaston says. “The inquiry method asks them to make the connections, and explain how they got their answers - it forces the students to think at a higher level. That depth of understanding serves a child well. The testing is secondary. We teach Virginia state standards, but we don’t make a big deal about the tests. The students will do what they need to do.”

Immediate past president of James River Elementary’s PTA, Charles W. Stover Jr., supports the program. “I have seen the curriculum expand and deliver the full range of opportunity to learn and go beyond the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs),” he says. “I have seen the adoption of an inquiry learning methodology and the enrichment of learning with an international perspective. I have seen ‘up close and personal’ the intellectual growth of a kindergarten student to a rising fifth grader with honor roll credentials.”

One James River Elementary mother, Laura Harris, finds that the characteristics expressed in the IB Learner’s Profile in school help to mutually reinforce the values she is trying to promote at home. “Sometimes kids think they can act differently at home, but these are traits they should be using everywhere,” she emphasizes. “If they are not getting along, I remind my children that being

caring is an IB trait. They’ve already heard that at school so they understand quickly what this means. The IB profile is especially good for kids who might not have that kind of support at home.”

Another James River Elementary mom of three, Cindy Sandelin, has been impressed by the way her children “learn the differences and similarities between themselves and other people around the world. It helps them to realize they are part of a world picture, not just part of James City County or Virginia.”

“IB exposes them to the world outside of Williamsburg, Virginia,” agrees James River Elementary mom, Chris Braig, who also appreciates the use of different themes and how they are incorporated into a range of subject areas. When her daughter wanted to start a club that would serve others, the idea was welcomed. “The school is able to embrace new ideas and think out of the box,” Braig says. “If the kids wanted to try something new, or have a new experience, they were encouraged. I loved the IB attitudes, reinforcing values and catching the students when they were being good. They were rewarded for demonstrating these values.”

Braig’s daughter Rachel was president of the Student Council Association last year. She also has a favorable opinion of the program. “I thought our IB school was really great and I liked it a lot,” she says. “Our school stands out because of that. I think every school should become an IB school.” According to Rachel, the IB attitudes, a list of characteristics promoted in the IB program, helped to create a positive atmosphere in the school.

“The IB attitudes made the school really friendly,” she added.

As in every school, James River Elementary has its share of remarkable teachers. Rachel talked about one in particular, Mrs. Nancy Hammond, a second-grade teacher known for her encouragement of students’ strengths and interests. “I had some interests and she helped them grow,” Rachel said. “She made you feel proud of yourself and what you’ve learned. She made what you were thinking about come to life.”

While many people are sad to see Dr. Gaston leave James River Elementary School, they are confident they can continue what he has helped lead in recent years. In a press release issued at the end of July, WJCC School Superintendent Gary Mathews said in regard to the search for Dr. Gaston’s successor, that he is “confident that we will find a top-flight leader for James River’s International Baccalaureate program.”

No matter what changes at James River Elementary, one thing is for sure: students, teachers, and parents will ensure that the IB values and united spirit of this school will prevail. NDN

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Hey Neighbor!

Email: heyneighbor@cox.net

Hey Neighbor!

I'm writing to tell you about the 7th Annual Fall Festival at Hickory Neck Episcopal Church in Toano. It has grown now to quite an event: a huge silent auction with items, vacations, tickets, and all sorts of donated goods and services from local merchants and church members; homemade navy bean soup and Brunswick stew and barbeque; a fantastic attic treasures sale featuring one of a kind items, a bake sale, a classic car show, tours of the historic Hickory Neck Church, children's activities like face painting, games and pony rides; a variety of music; arts and crafts and much more.

However, the best part about this festival is not just the fun you have or items you buy, it is that 100% of the proceeds go to support these ministries in our own community: Angels of Mercy Clinic supports uninsured and underinsured patients needing medical care; Faith in Action supports elderly, chronically ill or disabled adults striving to live in their own homes, and Vibrant Life works with the homeless in our area providing food, clothing and support. Last year we were able to donate about \$10,000 to the cause.

The festival is scheduled for Sept. 29 from 10:00AM til 3:00PM at Hickory Neck Episcopal Church, 8300 Richmond Road, Toano VA. Everyone is welcome!

Kathy Ramsaur

kathy.ramsaur@cox.net

757-565-0263

Hey Neighbor!

It's Asian Elephants on parade!

This is not the usual circus parade; it is a parade of elephant art coming to Williamsburg for the first such gallery showing in the mid-Atlantic United States. Two dozen paintings, drawn by Asian Elephants are on exhibit now through September 22 at Prince George Art & Frame (107 Colony Square,

Jamestown Road). Entitled "Pachyderm Painters: Paintings by Asian Elephants," the show features the works of 16 different elephant artists from three countries—Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Under the auspices of the Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project (AEACP), a non-profit organization in New York City, the show features acrylic works on paper in abstracts and fauna designs.

About a dozen years ago AEACP, a fully functioning charity organization [501 (c)3], was established with Russian-born artists Alexander Melamid and Vitaly Komar teaching the pachyderms to paint. They quickly found the practice to be a profitable humanitarian endeavor with museum and gallery shows developing throughout the world to help support the Asian Elephants. Proceeds from the sale will go to AEACP.

Fred Miller

757-229-7644

Hey Neighbor!

There will be a children's consignment sale at King of Glory Lutheran Church at 4897 Longhill Road in October. Over 200 consignors and over 15,000 high quality great priced items will be for sale. Proceeds from the sale will go to the King of Glory Preschool. Sale Dates and Times are: Friday, October 6th from noon until 7 p.m. and Saturday, October 7th from 8 a.m. to noon. Here are some of the items you will be able to find: Gently used seasonal children's clothing (newborn to teen), Halloween costumes and dress up, maternity clothing, nursery furniture, children's bedroom furniture and accessories, baby equipment, strollers, high chairs, toys, books, puzzles and videos.

Kimberly Kay

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Hey Neighbor!

The artcafe26 hosts every first Saturday of the month "Terry's Breakfast" to commemorate a wonderful lady, Terry Frasier, who lived in NewTown and passed away in February of 2007. As she suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, the artcafe26 established Terry's Breakfast in order to support one local RA patient; all of the proceeds from the breakfast go directly to the patient to help cover the costs of treatment and therapy. The support of our community is much appreciated as we try to help a person in need and remember a close friend. Thank you very much!

Regards,

Sibilla Dengs

Want to know more about Hey Neighbor!?

Hey Neighbor! is a way of communicating good things happening in Williamsburg. It is primarily for individuals and non-profit organizations to have a forum for sharing information that will benefit others - similar to chatting with your neighbor over the fence about something you think your neighbors would want to know.

Inclusion in the Hey Neighbor! feature requires the full name of the person submitting the information and a telephone number. (Phone numbers do not have to be published.) Space and relevancy of content are considerations for publishing. *Next Door Neighbors* reserves the right to edit as necessary.

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