AAPSNews

News, features, profiles and activities in The Ann Arbor Public Schools

Inside: • Veteran Technology Education instructor Gary Graff loves teaching at Scarlett Middle School, page 2 • A letter from the superintendent, page 2 • District partners with U-M Health System for depression training, page 3 • Other news from Tappan, Pioneer and Skyline, page 4

Detailed stories online at news.a2schools.org

A bi-monthly newsletter

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Learning large

Students invited outdoors for hands-on lessons

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Want to tell Dave Szczygie to take a hike? He’s likely to do just that.

The Ann Arbor district’s environmental education consultant can be found most weekdays visiting one of many area parks, wetlands and waterways with students. As he likes to say, “my classroom is out here.”

On this day, he dips into his treasure chest of assorted dried fungi, antlers and magazine clippings and calls upon his years of knowledge as a teacher and naturalist to keep the attention of a busload of Lakewood Elementary School fourth-graders.

They were headed for the Waterloo State Recreation Area west of Ann Arbor. “Who knows what FBI stands for?” he queries. In his line of work, it’s not a widely known federal agency, but “fungus, bacteria and invertebrates,” he tells students.

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has had an Environmental Education program since 1959, founded by William B. Stapp with the help of Maxine Smith Miles, according to information from the district.

The Ann Arbor program took off with the dedication of Stapp who wrote lessons plans for every grade level, said teacher Bill Browning who succeeded Stapp to run the program in 1968. Browning explained that Michigan was one of the leading states when environmental education first came on the scene and Ann Arbor’s K-12 program was the first of its kind in the country.

“It was very well received, even though it wasn’t inclusive of all classes,” Browning recalled. “The real secret of the success of this program is they got it into the curriculum as an accepted part.”

After Browning retired, Szczygie moved into the post. He is a biology major who found education the best route to take for a guy who grew up around nature and worked summers as a naturalist for the YMCA. “If you don’t

See Environmental Education, page 3

School funding

With the recent county millage defeat and continuing school financing discussions at the state level, Ann Arbor school officials are planning information sessions with the community early next year. Superintendent Todd Roberts offers an update on the school funding situation on page 2 of today’s edition. Details about upcoming meetings will be published in the Nov. 30 edition of the AAPSNews.

More stories and information can be found online at news.a2schools.org
Dear Readers,

I want to thank the many staff, student and community members who took the time during the recent millage election to become more knowledgeable about education funding in our district and in the state.

It is important that everyone stays engaged in the conversation about school funding as we work to address budget issues we face in The Ann Arbor Public Schools over the next few months. I believe that it is also imperative to make sure our voices continue to be heard in Lansing when it comes to providing adequate funding for education in our state.

At this point we are still waiting to hear from Lansing what our actual per pupil funding will be for this current school year. As you recall, AAPS was looking at a $525 per pupil loss in funding (approximately $8.7 million) this year. The State House then put forward a plan to restore $117 per pupil and half of the 20 funds (which is about $116 per pupil for AAPS) that were cut.

If the state Senate approves the House plan we would lose $292 per pupil in funding (approximately $4.8 million) for this school year. The governor has said that she will sign the House plan if approved by the Senate. At this point the Senate seems unlikely to support the House plan.

I expect that we will have a better idea of what our funding will be by Friday (Nov. 20) when the full funding proration order is supposed to go into effect.

The next steps in our budget process will take careful and thoughtful planning that will include input from parents, staff and the AAPS community. We are faced with some difficult, but not insurmountable, challenges and decisions.

We will host a series of meetings in December for staff and in January for parents and the community where we will discuss our financial situation and present options for reducing costs and enhancing revenues. During these meetings we will gather feedback about possible options in order to complete our draft budget plan for 2010-11 in February.

We also need to address the reduction in state funding this school year. Over the coming weeks we will take steps to address the loss in funding for the current fiscal year. Our goal in addressing the loss of funding for this school year is to reduce costs through means that will be least disruptive to our students and educational programs. We will discuss our options for cost reduction this year at a study session with the Board of Education on Dec. 3.

I know that we will continue working together collaboratively to ensure that our students receive an outstanding education despite the challenges we face. I look forward to working with you in the coming months.

Todd Roberts, Superintendent
The Ann Arbor Public Schools

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**Exceptional Education**

Input encouraged in budget sessions

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**Gary Graff**

**Occupation:** Technology education teacher at Scarlett Middle School for 34 years. He also taught for 25 years as an adjunct professor at Eastern Michigan University.

**Education:** Bachelor’s and master’s degrees in industrial education from Eastern Michigan University.

**Residence:** Chelsea.

**Age:** 57.

**Family:** Married to Sandi for 35 years. Two sons: Dan and Dave.

**Pets:** A cat Neemy and fond memories of a Labrador retriever named Sunny.

**Hobbies:** Hands-on projects, camping, coaching, baseball and Civil War history. He also enjoys travel, scuba diving and fishing.

**Community service:** Active at the First United Methodist Church in Chelsea and stays involved with student programs and activities at Scarlett Middle School.

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**Staff in the Spotlight: Gary Graff**

**Gary Graff**

Gary Graff’s 34 years in The Ann Arbor Public Schools can be focused in one place: Scarlett Middle School where he has worked since it opened.

Graff was first offered a temporary job and after a few weeks, he came aboard fulltime. “I decided this was the place for me,” said Graff, 57, talking recently between first and third hours in his Technology Education classroom.

“We are one, big family. It’s just kind of a natural fit.”

He estimates he has had about 15,000 children attend his classes at Scarlett over his years teaching. He points to a handsaw. “I tell the students, every (student) hand has touched that,” he said.

In his early years as a teacher, he taught traditional industrial arts. A program that once encouraged only boys to take what was called “shop” today encourages students with an interest in computer-aided design or engineering to sign up. Graff said his classes are pretty evenly divided between boys and girls today.

“It’s a balance between the old and the new,” he explained.

He takes the science curriculum and matches his classes to it. Sixth-graders focus on earth sciences, seventh-graders on life sciences and eighth-graders on physical sciences.

And the kids seem to embrace it. An extracurricular Engineering Club recently attracted 27 students to sign up for the after-school session in one recent week.

Ellen Daniel, a teacher at Scarlett and former Ann Arbor school board member, said her children have enjoyed Graff’s classes over the years. “He does so many things so well that it is difficult to know where to begin,” she said. “An hour spent with Gary is observation of a Master Teacher at work.”

Daniel noted that he is “thoughtful and reflective” and is always looking for ways to improve in the classroom. “I know that I am a better teacher for having his example and support,” she added, noting that Graff was selected as the Scarlett Teacher of the Year last year.

Graff has a definite passion for his profession. “I wanted to be in the classroom. It’s my chosen work – I love what I do,” he said. And, he credits his chosen teaching area to a great drafting instructor in high school who “taught me it was more than bending metal and building boards,” he said.

He shares his love of education with his wife of 35 years, Sandi, who is a second-grade teacher in Manchester. The two grew up in Saline where they knew each other as youngsters and became high school sweethearts before marrying and raising two sons. In their early years, the family lived in both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti before building a home and settling in Chelsea.

During his years at Scarlett, Graff has been an assistant coach and coordinated the school yearbook for a time. He still attends school events to support the Scarlett kids.

Graff said today’s students are better behaved than many in year’s past. “The school district gets the credit,” he said. “Things like the anti-bullying program; they have kids come together and work in teams. The behavior has been much improved.”

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**Veteran teacher loves Scarlett**

By Case Hans

AAPS New Service

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**Scarlett teacher Gary Graff works with a few of his many students in his technology education classroom.**
More stories and information can be found online at news.a2schools.org
81 honored at dinner
Eighty-one Ann Arbor high school students were honored Nov 7 at the annual Freedom Fund Dinner, sponsored by the Ann Arbor chapter of the NAACP. African-American students who have earned at least a 3.2 grade point average in school are honored. Keynote speaker was Washtenaw County Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton. Honorees included:

Community High School:
First-year scholar Chelsea Evans-Warren; second-year scholars Max Bowen, Emily Milligan, Tamara Parks and Samantha Thomas.

Huron High School:
First-year scholars Camyle Allen, Christiana Allen-Pipkin, Sariya Bryanich, Allante’ Burnell, Blair Crockett, Tyler Davis, Sharzay Fields, Je-Juan French, LaMica Hugheshanks, Kamarria Lee, Maya Long, Fatou Ndaw, Cynthia Offili, Chinnyere Onimo, Lindsey Whitlock, Dallas Williams; second-year scholars Brittany Cole, Gamachirai Dingwiza, Awah Ditah, Yonica Dupree, Marysa Hill, Jeremy Jackson and Imani Watkins; third-year scholars Whitney Foster, Ralph Green, Noelle Kahunubga, Devon Micou and Bre’Anna Simpson.

Pioneer High School:

Skyline High School:

Stone High School:
First-year scholar Brittany Hayes.

Tappan 6th-graders learn love of language from U-M lineman
David Moosman, starting senior offensive lineman from the University of Michigan football team visited the sixth-grade team of Victoria Power (pictured with him above), James Corbett, Maria Erickson and Patricia Hueter at Tappan Middle School’s media center on Nov. 2.

An English major at U-M, Moosman spoke about his love of reading and writing and told students that his mother inspired his field of study. Moosman read Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” for students. “Every year I introduce the Poetry Genre with Robert Frost’s poem and connect with the kids in conversation about the “new” road they will be traveling on starting middle school,” Power said.

Pioneer advanced placement students get real life writing experience
In what is normally a literature driven course, Don Packard’s Advanced Placement English students at Pioneer High School took a break from “The Scarlett Letter” to visit with Brad Hedeman from Zingerman’s online.

Hedeman, who is responsible for the online content for Zingerman’s Mail Order business, came to Pioneer Nov. 5 to talk about how he writes and the process he employs when writing about food.

Students were then given a chance to write their own product descriptions of chocolate bacon that is sold at the store and through Zingerman’s mail order. The “winning” product description will replace the existing copy on the Zingerman’s Web site. Look for it in weeks to come.

Zingerman’s Mail Order is part of The Zingerman’s Community of Businesses in Ann Arbor. Visit www.zingermans.com.

Skyline swimmers help in the classroom, raise money for breast cancer research
RIGHT: Members of the Skyline High School Women’s Swimming Team spent their day off recently reading to the Young 5s and kindergarten classes at Abbot Elementary. They were welcomed by teachers Sarah Bradley and Carol DeKeyzer and their students. The partnership went swimmingly: The students athletes have been invited back after the Young 5s have completed the stories they are now writing.

LEFT: The second Skyline-Pioneer Swim-for-the-Cure took place recently. Each year the athletes spend the week prior to the swim meet learning about breast cancer and sharing their experiences with the disease. This year, the team honored Pioneer High School senior Hannah Maxbauer’s mother, Jan Maxbauer, who is being treated for breast cancer. Here, Skyline and Pioneer swimmers mingle during the competition.

photo by Eva Leissou