

AAPSNews

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

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UMS: Burns Park a hub of arts, culture

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

The University Musical Society is singing the praises of Burns Park Elementary School, which was selected as this year's UMS School of the Year for its rich history in fine arts and music and its approach to incorporating them into its programs.

"Burns Park certainly demonstrates this commitment, through not only its participation in UMS programs but the entire school's commitment to celebrating the arts and cultures of the world..." wrote Claire C. Rice, UMS interim director of education and audience development, in a recent letter to Principal Kathy Morhous.

The announcement was made March 10 before the Ann Arbor Board of Education and will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m. March 20 at the Ford Honors Program at U-M's Michigan League. The DTE Energy Foundation sponsors the award.

"We're proud to be part of the Burns Park community," said Morhous. "We all value what the arts bring to life. It's nice to know we've been recognized."

Robin Bailey, fine arts coordinator for the district, said the Ann Arbor elementary has "gone above and beyond to try to make the arts special for kids." She called the district's partnership with UMS second

Featured story



Music teacher Cynthia Page Bogen works with fourth graders at Burns Park Elementary School, teaching them a new song in her music room. Page Bogen's approach to teaching has been noted as one of the reasons the school won the UMS School of the Year award.

to none. "They picked Burns Park because they've had a long-standing commitment to UMS and integrating the arts into the school," Bailey said.

Ann Arbor Public Schools has "a constant commitment" to arts in the K-12 schools, she said. "This long-standing commitment of a district to the arts allows a school like Burns Park to get this award," she said.

UMS also offered special thanks

to music teacher Cynthia Page Bogen for her long-standing participation and advocacy with UMS.

Morhous said Page Bogen uses the UMS lineup each year, fitting programs into her classroom. "She just weaves it throughout her year," she said. "If UMS doesn't have something (that fits with her

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PTO Council advocates for school funding

New group formed to educate, inform

From AAPSNews Service

A group of Ann Arbor parents is banding together to create a voice for change in state funding for public schools.

The PTO Council Advocacy Committee hosted its first organization meeting this month, where attendees discussed an approach to better educating state elected officials as well as parents and community and business leaders about the school funding problem.

"You showing up today means you are an opinion leader in our community," parent and PTO Council Board member Donna Lasinski told the group. She said legislators need to hear directly from their constituents about school funding problems.

"The only way they're going to know what needs to be fixed and how important it is for the community is for us to tell them," she added.

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Looking ahead

What: PTO Council Advocacy Committee meeting

Where: Balas Administration Building, 2555 S. State St., Ann Arbor

When: 9-10:30 a.m., Tuesday, March 23

Who: Any parent or resident of The Ann Arbor Public Schools who wants to get involved with a movement for better school funding in Lansing.

Why: To organize and educate others about the problems with the current school funding model.

School Bells: News from around the district

Community finishes 1st and 3rd in regional mock trial

Community High School's mock trial teams finished in first and third place among 41 teams competing at the Michigan High School Mock Trial Eastern Regional Tournament March 13. Both teams head for the state finals in Lansing on March 27.

Team A finished in first place: Shadi Ahmadmehrab, Savannah Dix, Mira Fishman, Jacob Garber, Michelle Grifka, Jack Kausch, Max Lewis, Michael Savage, Elise Wander and Garrett Wood. Team B finished in third place: Zack Bayoff, Sara Burakoff, Cooper DePriest, Isaac Fink, Rianna Johnson-Levy, Julia Karr, Leah Penner, Eli Sugerman and Kelsey Teribery. The bailiiff/timekeeper is Matt Morehouse, the teacher coach is Cheryl Grace, the attorney coach is Griffith Dick and the drama coach is Billie Ochberg.

District recognized

The Ann Arbor Public Schools was recognized in a Forbes.com report this month that named the city as No. 1 in a ranking of "Top College Sports Towns." "Ann Arbor has great public schools, low crime and affordable housing. Not surprisingly, it all adds up to the highest rank on our list of best college towns," the report said in its overview, later calling the Ann Arbor district "a top-notch public school

Trombonist Max Hully, a Community High School Advanced Combo member and a Pioneer High School Jazz Band member, was recently selected as "outstanding" at the University of Michigan Jazz Festival. He and two other soloists were invited to play with the U-M Jazz



Ensemble in an evening concert at the Power Center, where they played with guest bassist Christian McBride, one of the top three upright bass stars. Above is a photo taken at the Power Center performance.

system" in its detailed report of the community.

2 receive district awards

Two Ann Arbor Public Schools employees were recent recipients of the district's Celebration of Excellence awards sponsored by the Ann Arbor Board of Education and the PTO Council. Both Patrick Dombrowski, a Forsythe Middle School paraeducator, and Beth Bernacki, a Skyline High School history teacher, were nominated for Outstanding Customer Service at the March 10 school board meeting.

4 Presidential Scholar candidates at Pioneer

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has

four Presidential Scholar candidates for 2010 and all are from Pioneer High School, according to information from Superintendent Todd Robert's office. They include: Spencer O. Johnson, Daniel J. Kriz, Leah A. Latterner and Jacob C. Postema. The program honors some of the nation's most distinguished graduating seniors. The 2010 Presidential Scholars will be announced in June.

Cartwright earns kudos

Lorin Cartwright, athletic director and assistant principal at Pioneer High School, was awarded the Great Lakes Athletic Trainers' Association's Outstanding Educator Award.

She is the author of three books and was the first woman and first high school athletic trainer to serve as the president of the Great Lakes

Athletic Trainers' Association. She holds a bachelor's degree in physical education from Grand Valley State College and a master's degree in education from the University of Michigan.

Pittsfield hosts event

Pittsfield Elementary School is hoping to attract scrapbookers to a Scrapbook Crop in March to raise funds for school enrichment and PTO-sponsored activities, according to Pittsfield Elementary School parent and PTO member Ann Farnham. The event is planned for March 20, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Pittsfield Elementary. Registration is \$45 per person, or \$40 each if signing up with a friend or friends. Contact event organizer Angelique Boerst via e-mail at boerst@umich.edu or call 734-572-8805.

Librarians share expertise with Skyline students

• A detailed story with photos can be found online: news.a2schools.org

Librarians at The University of Michigan and the Ann Arbor District Library have taken Skyline High School students under wing, showing them the ins and outs of library use which, these days, is heavy on technology.

Gabriel Duque, undergraduate learning librarian at U-M's Shapiro Library, said the library hosted a group of advance placement history students over three consecutive days, helping them learn the ropes and teaching them research techniques.

"We threw a lot at them and they stayed with us," Duque said. "I don't think the goal is for them to be experts. It's really important for them, fundamentally, to see the difference between the high school and a big research library."

Sherlonya Turner, youth services manager at the Ann Arbor District Library's main branch, was invited to Skyline. "We ... showed them what was available," she said. "We pointed out that the library's a lot more than a physical space you can visit."

Eight students were certified as the district's first Teen Certified Emergency Response Team, or CERT, during a March 8 event at Huron High School. The team's training was sponsored by the Readiness Emergency Management for Schools, or



REMS, grant. Students who are certified for the Teen CERT include: Community High School's Justin Weiland and the following students from Huron High School: Melissa Tykosky, Christine Gallarin, Nyeisha Hutson-Legette, Ambar Akhlas, Lauren Lakin, Valeria Islas-Montantes and Ashley Garzaniti. The team was certified thanks to Lynn Boland, Huron Life Sciences teacher and Mike Loper of Patriot Services Corp.



The Angell Elementary School community celebrated in February with Angell International Night, one of the biggest events during the school year. An international parade, seen above, was just one of the events featured. For more photos, visit online: news.a2schools.org

Teacher continues lessons from life on the ice

Robin Frisch-Gleason

Occupation: A geologist and fourth-grade teacher at Bach Elementary School.

Residence: In the Dicken neighborhood of Ann Arbor.

Education: Bachelor's degree in Geology from Oberlin College and Master's of Science degree in Geology from Vanderbilt University.

Age: 49.

Family: Married to James Gleason, a science professor at The University of Michigan. They have two daughters, Maia, 17, who attends Pioneer High School, and Ivy, 13, who attends Slauson Middle School.

Pets: A cat, Buddha.

Hobbies: Plays the guitar, sings and also loves to write. She is currently trying to get published her children's book "Leroy's Antarctic Adventure," based on her travels to Antarctica.

Community service: She is active with the Antarctic Geological Drilling Project, known as ANDRILL, as well as ANDRILL's classroom project for teachers. In addition, she also is active with the Bach Elementary Service Squad, which recently raised money for Haiti relief and UNICEF and co-chairs the school's Green School Initiative with Tina Ezekiel. The initiative deals with composting, recycling and issues of the waste stream. "It all has to do with climate," she said.

Favorite meals: "I like all ethnic food, but Indian food is a favorite of mine."

Last book read: "A World Without Ice" by Henry Pollack.

Life philosophy: "Live each day like it's your last. We never know what tomorrow brings."

From AAPSNews Service

You can bring her out of the field and into the classroom, but you can't take the science out of Robin Frisch-Gleason. The Bach Elementary School fourth-grade teacher left a career as a geologist to teach 11 years ago, but she hasn't lost her love of science and climate issues, which she continues to share.



Twenty-five years ago, Frisch-Gleason visited Antarctica to do her master's thesis, and then returned in October 2007 for 10 weeks with ANDRILL, the Antarctic Geological Drilling project. She was part of ANDRILL's Research Immersion for Science Educators, sharing updates on the expedition with students and doing hands-on work in core sampling and testing.

"I had always been fascinated with the polar regions. It's something I feel incredibly fortunate to be a part of," she said. "I was fortunate to be able to go and I have an obligation to share that experience."

ANDRILL is an international research collaboration of more than 200 scientists, students, and educators. Scientists drill back in time to discover glacial and interglacial changes in the Antarctic region. They take samples offshore, analyzing sediment core from below the ocean floor. "Different layers tell us different things," she explained.

Her classroom and the Ann Arbor school community followed Frisch-Gleason's progress in 2007. Before leaving, she visited about 2,000 students around the district and called in

with regular reports from the ice.

"They felt, through me, that the polar areas were accessible," she said. "They realized that they can do anything, that our Earth is fragile and that ... they will be our future policy-makers and they can make changes."

Fellow fourth-grade teacher Carol Tarchinski works closely with Frisch-Gleason, who she said is always willing to share and has kept students interested since her trip.

"It seems like she's done something every year to extend the kids' learning here," Tarchinski said, adding that Frisch-Gleason organized a pen-pal exchange with a teacher in New Zealand and has continued her outreach.

"I think the students definitely understand her heart and soul is in it," Tarchinski said. "They begin to embrace it too."

Frisch-Gleason is organizing a spring summit on climate change for students (see related story below.)

Only 14 teachers, including Frisch-Gleason, were part of the 2006 and 2007 drilling expeditions to the planet's southernmost continent.

Louise Huffman, ANDRILL coordinator of education and outreach, traveled on the 2007 trip, supervising the group. "Robin is a great teacher," she said. "She knows what children need to get motivated. She knows how to teach complicated concepts to young children. She can explain science in a way that breaks it down even more."

After her travels, Frisch-Gleason wrote a children's book featuring a time-traveling worm, illustrated by her daughter, Maia Gleason. Huffman said ANDRILL is considering publishing a Web-based version of the book.



'I am constantly reminded of how very small and insignificant I am in the greater scheme of things. ... Nature rules on this continent – and we are merely passing visitors.'

– Robin Frisch-Gleason, in a blog entry posted before leaving Antarctica in 2007

Climate change summit

This year, eight Ann Arbor Public Schools teachers have been invited to bring students for the first full ANDRILL "C2S2 Student Climate Change Summit" which is taking place April 24 at three locations around the United States: in Ann Arbor at the Exhibit Museum of Natural History at the University of Michigan, at the Chicago Museum of Science and History and at the Campbell Creek Science Center in Anchorage, Alaska. The summit is funded through a grant from the U.S.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The teachers all attended training workshops put on by Frisch-Gleason in January

which allows them to participate and bring their students. Teachers from AAPS include:

- Courtney Kiley – Community High School
- Johanna Nader – Slauson Middle School
- Neha Shah – King Elementary School
- Shaugn Kalnaraups – Lakewood Elementary School
- Carla Tchal – Carpenter Elementary School.
- Aina Bernier – AA Open @ Mack
- Valerie Wesley – Lawton Elementary School
- Robin Frisch-Gleason – Bach Elementary School

Exceptional Education

Burns Park, from page 1

theme at each grade level) she looks elsewhere.”

Page Bogen said there is a “long tradition of the arts here” and that she loves collaborating with other teachers. “Putting music in its context is so important and I like to do that,” she added.

Morhous said the entire staff shares in the award. “The entire school embraces the approach,” she said. “The music teacher can’t do it without the support of the classroom teachers. It takes the whole school. It’s working around the schedules ... to make sure they have this wonderful experience.”

Art teacher Kate Higgins does a lot of community outreach in art and culture, which has helped to contribute to the UMS recognition, Morhous said. “Kate’s entire curriculum

celebrates art from around the world. When the PTO heads up a multi-cultural celebration, Kate is right there weaving the art of that world culture into the classroom. Kate and Cynthia are the teachers that work with the PTO on these multi-cultural themes.”

Higgins is beginning her annual involvement with Festifools, which includes the involvement of parent Mark Tucker, who teaches art at U-M and heads up the Festifools event. He is helping Higgins and her students create papier-mâché puppets that will be part of the Festifool display on April 11.

Morhous said that Higgins also is supportive of Page Bogen’s musicals and UMS, often working with students to design T-shirts to



Music teacher Cynthia Page Bogen.

wear while on stage or creating artwork that reflects the culture highlighted by the UMS concert.

Burns Park Elementary School is centrally located near the University of Michigan’s Central Campus, which allows many student field trips to U-M to be walking ones, Morhous said. It was built in 1921 on the west end of Burns Park, opening as Tappan Junior High School and then converted to an elementary school in 1951.

The school’s location near U-M offers a unique opportunity. “Our kids just get that wealth of experience and knowledge you wouldn’t get unless they were that close by,” Morhous said.

The PTO and parents also get involved, which helps keep the program solid. In recent years, for

example, a group of dads came together to create a band to accompany students. And the PTO pays a stipend to a U-M graduate student to help Page Bogen with her composition class.

The Burns Park Players, a community theater group, has its roots at the elementary school. It has grown but remains involved at Burns Park. Between 80-100 Burns Park students and their parents participate in the Players’ production annually; it continues to raise money for arts programs in the district.

“Community Circles” take place at the school each Wednesday when cross-grade groups meet to talk about acceptance life skills, making friends and other human attributes that help the school as a community.

“I really do think we work hard to make sure our children feel comfortable and at home,” Morhous added. “We work hard to help kids appreciate who they are.”

PTO advocates, from page 1

Part of the group’s approach will include researching other school districts and teaming up with parent groups in other Michigan communities to advocate with a larger voice about issues of school funding.

Members also hope to broaden their base by reaching out to community and civic groups in Ann Arbor and writing to state legislators directly.

Lasinski, Deputy Chairwoman of the PTO Council Executive Board, is spearheading the local effort. She stressed the new organization would be an advocacy group and will not lobby directly for legislative changes. She said the group is nonpartisan.

The next meeting of the group will be on Tuesday, March 23 from 9-10:30 a.m. at the Balas Administration Building, 2555 S. State St.

Ann Arbor Public Schools faced \$8 million in cuts mid-year and is facing upwards of \$20 million for the 2010-11 fiscal year due to expected reductions in state per pupil school aid. The district has received the majority of its funding from the state since 1994 and the passage of

Proposal A, which transferred funding from local property taxes to state control, lowered property taxes and set minimum per-pupil funding for public school districts.

Under Proposal A, a countywide initiative is the only way for local districts to obtain additional operating funds and it must be approved throughout the county. Voters in Washtenaw County turned down a countywide millage request last November, although advocacy committee members point out that Ann Arbor voters approved the measure.

Lasinski noted that, according to information from the group Save our Students, Schools and State, more than 109,000 people left Michigan last year, contributing to a loss in state property, sales and income taxes which also affect state revenues.

She told those attending the organizational meeting that changing school financing is the job of the state legislature. “It’s the legislator’s job – we elected them to satisfy our community needs,” she said. “We’re not going to tell them how to do it. Our job is to advocate for stable



Amy Pachera, right, makes a point during the first meeting of the Ann Arbor PTO Council Advocacy Committee. The next meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. Tuesday, March 23 at the Balas Administration Building.

school funding.”

Committee member Amy Pachera, also a member of the PTO Council Executive Board, agreed. “We need to bend their (legislators’) ears to get them fighting for this too.”

Parent Patricia Kowalski said legislators need to know “that there is a local group working to change things for the long-term” in school funding.

Steve Norton, who heads up Ann Arbor Parents for Schools, a citizen advocacy group with a similar mission, also attended. “There is no voice at the state level for parents,” he said, adding that many times the pleas of local school districts and their employees are ignored. “It has

gotten so bad ...

that they (legislators) feel ‘people who work in the schools couldn’t possibly be arguing for something that’s good for kids.’”

He said direct contact with the legislators often gives constituents a solid voice. “That’s the only indication they (legislators) get of what their constituents want,” he said. “It’s tangible and it gives them leverage with their colleagues.”

Lasinski said she wants to encourage others to become part of the PTO Council’s Advocacy Committee. Membership is open to all parents and employees of The Ann Arbor Public Schools. Contact Lasinski at lasinski@mac.com or call her at 734-997-7265.