

AAPSNews

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

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Issue No. 15, May 24, 2010



Wines students pack bologna and cheese with a side of love

Students make bag lunches for area shelters

Featured story

VIDEO online at a2schools.org

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

A bologna-and-cheese assembly line took over the Wines Elementary School lunchroom on a recent Thursday.

A team of second-graders was preparing 100 bag lunches to be delivered to area shelters as part of the school's Lunches With Love

program. Many bags had personal messages written and drawn on them, offering words of encouragement to those who will ultimately consume them.

"The shelters wait for us. They call us 'the bologna ladies,'" said parent volunteer Karin Brandt, who helped to set up the Wines program with former PTO President Sheri Belcher.

Brandt said she was looking for a simple, but meaningful, way to get involved with the school, and this was it. Food Gatherers came into the school, did an in-service training for

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A Wines Elementary School second-grader makes and packs a sandwich during the school's Lunches With Love program. Each classroom rotates through the program throughout the school year, packing bag lunches for area shelters.



Jeremy Moghtader of The Agrarian Adventure shows a visitor the gardens and greenhouse on the grounds at Tappan Middle School. Students use the garden for learning throughout the school year.

Healthy approach draws attention

Tappan Agrarian Garden, enhanced cafeteria food program on tour of national group

From AAPSNews Service

They're getting a healthy dose of good eating at Tappan Middle School, where visitors from a national conference recently toured the school's Agrarian Garden and heard about expanded healthy cafeteria offerings by Chartwells, the Ann Arbor school district's food service provider.

Jeremy Moghtader, a member of The Agrarian Adventure

nonprofit board that coordinates the school garden, explained how the community and school started the project in 2003.

"There's been a lot of heavy lifting by a lot of volunteers," said Moghtader, who, in addition to volunteering for The Agrarian Adventure, works as program coordinator for the MSU Student Organic Farm project. He was speaking to a group from the National Farm to

Cafeteria Conference that was visiting Tappan.

The garden has spawned everything from an after-school garden club (that got a grant from the Women's Farm and Garden Club and built a passive solar greenhouse) to the sixth-grade gym class that hauled steel for the greenhouse structure and math classes that

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Student art in spotlight at Slusser Gallery

From AAPSNews Service

Dozens of families filled a reception this month at the Jean Paul Slusser Gallery on the University of Michigan's North Campus which features dozens of student works of art from the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Everything from multi-media productions, pottery, oils, jewelry and mixed media is represented in the district's largest student art show of the year, which runs through Friday, June 4.

Laura Radwan, a senior at Huron High School, has two pieces of jewelry exhibited and said she thought the show was a wonderful highlight to her time in Ann Arbor. "I hope in college I can take something just as fun," she said of her art experience at Huron. She plans to attend Ohio University in Athens where she will study music production.

"It's wonderful to see what the students can do," added Sigrid Radwin, Laura's grandmother who came with family members and friends to enjoy the reception.

The spring multi-media event features the collective work of selected students in grades kindergarten through 12 and showcases approximately 400 works of art, said Steve Coron, a Community High School art teacher who is coordinating this year's event. Ann Arbor art teachers selected the works to be exhibited.

Robin Bailey, fine arts coordinator for The Ann Arbor Public Schools, estimated that several hundred persons attended the evening reception, which included refreshments as well as entertainment by the Community High School Jazz Band. "Their students (U-M) have left, so it worked well for us. They're thrilled to have us here," she said.

Bailey said art teachers spent a lot of time matting student work and preparing it for the gallery presentation. "I just think it's wonderful that kids have an opportunity to see their work in a public space," she added.



A family looks at one of the student's works of art at the district's spring student exhibit at U-M.

AAPS Spring Student Art Exhibition

When: Through June 4. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday and noon to 7 p.m. Saturday. Closed holidays.

Where: Jean Paul Slusser Gallery, U-M School of Art & Design, 2000 Bonisteel Blvd., Ann Arbor.

Cost: Free.

Featured story

VIDEO online at a2schools.org

Anja, a second-grader at Haisley Elementary School, said she based her art piece on the work of American painter Georgia O'Keeffe. "I just did my picture in art class and it got picked," she said, showing off her displayed work to her proud family.

Dicken Elementary first-grader Andy and his sister, Casey, a second-grader, both had artwork displayed. Casey's papier maché-style fish was exhibited in a work she dubbed "Fishie."

Eberwhite Elementary parent Nate Berent-Spillson was on hand to see his kindergarten son's work, but was enjoying all of it. "I think this is great," he said. "The range of different kinds of art and different mediums and the range of grades is impressive."

In previous years, the show was hosted at U-M's Rackham Building, then moved to the Washtenaw Intermediate School District and came back to U-M last year. "The School of Art & Design has embraced our program," Coron said. "We're very happy to be there."

A more detailed story can be found online: <http://news.a2schools.org>

PTOC advocacy group launches parent postcard campaign

From AAPSNews Service

Members of the Ann Arbor PTO Council Advocacy Committee are organizing a postcard campaign, offering parents in the district a chance to voice their concerns to elected state officials about the issue of school funding.

The group, now 35 parents strong and growing, will have a presence at end-of-year school events where families will have the opportunity to write notes to state legislators that members will hand deliver to the capitol in future weeks.

Chairwoman Donna Lasinski stressed that the group is not suggesting a specific message – just allowing parents a way to have their say individually, in their own words.

"It's to give them the opportunity to say things that are important to them," she said. "We offer an opportunity for parent voice, a path for parents to express their concerns."

The group formed this year to advocate for changes in the way schools are funded at the state level. Ann Arbor is trimming \$20 million from its budget for the 2010-11 school year, which begins July 1.

Ann Arbor PTOC Advocacy Committee members will have materials on hand for students to draw pictures and for both students and parents to write notes. All will be passed along the appropriate legislators.

Lasinski said the group has already begun meeting one-on-one with state-level legislators and candidates to ask for four things:

- Guarantee school funding levels are set prior to the start of the school fiscal year.
- Support schools at a level that provides for a quality education based on program cost, not current dollars available.
- Develop a stable, sustainable funding model for school funding.
- Prioritize education funding as the top state priority against other funding needs.

Group members stress that they will not endorse candidates or support specific legislation. Visit <http://a2schools.org/ptoc.home/>, find them on Facebook or e-mail ptoc.a2advocacy@gmail.com.

Northside teacher is devoted to kids' health

From AAPSNews Service

Rick Dekeon is on the go. Whether he's running for pleasure, working out with students, teaching a class or having a conversation with a colleague, he always has something on his plate.

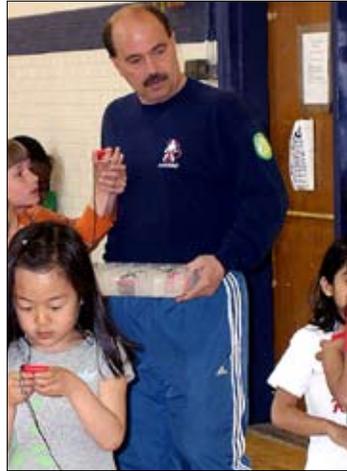
The longtime physical education teacher at Northside Elementary School may be best known for his 7-year-old Cross Country Kids Club – which involves nearly half of the students any given year. This year, 130 of the school's 285 students participate.

The before-school club on Tuesdays and Thursdays offers kids a new approach to fitness, he said. "Running is a lifelong pursuit. Anyone can do it – it just takes a pair of shoes and the will to do it. They can run and walk for the rest of their lives."

He also sponsors fun runs and other activities that bring out dozens of youngsters, as well as their parents. His motto as found on his Web page: "Run fast, run hard, walk if you must... but always finish!"

Dekeon is not a clock watcher. His day often begins before 7 a.m. and finishes long after 5 p.m. Dekeon also works out with a handful of students during his lunch hour daily, encouraging them in their fitness efforts. He coordinates all-school events, such as hockey nights and the mid-May walkathon-runathon and plays floor hockey with students before school on Fridays.

This attention to health and fitness is just a part of who Dekeon is, says longtime friend Bob Kreger, who also coached



Rick Dekeon works in the gym with a group of Northside Elementary students.

youth soccer with Dekeon for many years and said he is a sort of Pied Piper that the kids willingly follow. "He's all about helping build kids' confidence," says Kreger. "Rick has absolutely wonderful skills. He's always so positive about the young people. It's his core belief: I think he just wants to help kids."

Kreger adds that Dekeon always takes a "play hard, but play fair" approach. "And I've never, ever heard him use a harsh word, but they might have to do a few laps until they'll listen to him. In the end, they're all working together. He's a real cementer in that way."

Dekeon has a pay-it-forward philosophy. In his drawer are postcards he mails to students to encourage them and certificates that he hands out when students have done something nice for others. He believes not only in physical activity, but also in teaching about life skills, such as nutritional eating. "I like to try new things. You can be

innovative without losing your approach to learning," he said.

Principal Monica Harrold calls Dekeon "dedicated, genuinely caring and very compassionate." He also responsible: Dekeon serves as her lead teacher, to whom she entrusts the running of the school if she is out of the building.

"You name it, Rick does it," Harrold said. "He is really quite an incredible teacher and person. The kids love him and the parents respect him."

"Every kid is his kid," Harrold added. "The whole building is his classroom."

In addition to his dedication to K-5 students, Dekeon also reaches out into the community, where he welcomes student teachers from a number of local colleges and universities. Pat Van Volkinburg, assistant dean for academic programs for the University of Michigan School of Kinesiology knows Dekeon well and calls him "patient" and "unflappable" and said he is one of her most requested teachers among student teachers. "He has been mentoring our students for years," she said.

He works with them as college sophomores, allows juniors to come into his classes and observe and then gets them as student teachers in their senior year. Van Volkinburg said he stays in touch with all of them.

"They e-mail him for free advice," she added. She places Dekeon at the top of her list of people she admires and respects. "The things that he does for the school shouldn't be taken lightly," she said. "It is not the norm."

Rick Dekeon

Occupation: Physical education teacher at Northside Elementary School since 1988, where he also serves as the school's lead teacher.

Residence: An Ann Arbor native and Pioneer High School graduate who lives on the city's west side.

Education: Bachelor's degree in physical education and health from Eastern Michigan University with minors in marketing and biology.

Age: 52

Family: Single.

Pets: No pets, but still misses his longtime cat, Domino, who was 22 pounds of fun.

Hobbies: Running, plays hockey in an over-30 league and also plays drop-in hockey at the Ann Arbor Ice Cube. He is a voracious reader.

Community service: Coordinates before- and after-school activities such as the Cross Country Kids Club and Friday morning floor hockey. He is a co-adviser for the Northside Student Council. He coached at Huron High School for 10 years (4 as J.V. soccer coach and 6 as head varsity coach) and currently coaches freshman soccer at Skyline High School.

Honors: 2008 Elementary Teacher of the Year for the Michigan Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Awarded an AAPS Celebration of Excellence Award in 2003.

Favorite meal: "I love pasta. I'm a hot dog addict. But I watch my fat intake and I drink a lot of water. I try to eat healthy."

Last book read: "Born to Run – a Hidden Tribe, Super Athletes and the Greatest Race the World has Ever Seen" by Christopher McDougall.

Life philosophy: "Learn by having fun. And try your best in everything – always."

Exceptional Education

Lunches, from page 1

parents to teach them to set it up, and they were off and running. . . “It’s an easy way for parents to get involved,” she said.

The Wines program is in its fifth year and is coordinated by parent Marie Sklar who said it is done

every other Thursday, allowing each classroom to rotate through once each school year. A similar program is done at Burns Park Elementary.

Sklar said the program is a great way for Wines to link with the community. “It’s a nice mitzvah,” she said. “We’re fortunate in this community. It’s something for them (students) to learn at a young age.”

Sklar said once the parent volunteers get things set up, it takes not even an hour for students to come in, make the sandwiches and pack them up for delivery. “The kids are so self-sufficient,” she said. “They pretty much know what to do.”

Parents get what food they can from Food Gatherers and supplement that with trips to the grocery

story. They spend between \$30-50 for each Lunches With Love, mostly funded through the Wines PTO Community Service Outreach Fund.

“The teachers try to explain this might be someone’s only meal today,” said parent volunteer Patty Kersch. Students “write messages, they do beautiful pictures. I think they really get it.”

Health, from page 1

squared the site for construction. Since the garden’s beginnings, he said, myriad classroom teachers have used it for lessons such as American History – where students grow and cook with root vegetables in a Colonial style – and math classes that learn about graphing by laying out planting beds. Tappan students plant seedlings on Earth Day and each fall there is a Harvest Dinner where 100-plus people enjoy the fruits of the Tappan garden on a sliding fee scale.

“We wanted students to have a positive healthy interaction and exposure to these things,” Moghtader added. “They’re having fun growing food, preparing food. They eat it and grow it from seed. It’s really cool and they love it.”

Elissa Trumbell, also a volunteer for The Agrarian Adventure project, said the nonprofit also expands out into the elementary schools by bringing local farmers into classrooms. In the coming school year, she said, group hopes to use the Tappan garden site for elementary school visits and other lessons.

The nonprofit started with the goal of “enriching the students’ connection to the Earth,” said Trumbell. They operate with grants and donations.

Healthy approach in cafeterias

During the recent tour, an expansion of a the district’s Farm-to-School program was being unveiled by representatives of Chartwells, the Ann Arbor schools food service vendor.

Called “Farm Fresh Days,” the program was started in 2006 with a grant to bring fresh produce from local farms one day each week at three



David Lahey, center, food services director for The Ann Arbor Public Schools, talks with conference attendees at the Tappan cafeteria, where an additional healthy eating initiative was launched this month.

schools, eventually expanding to all schools and fresh produce two days each week. It is also used in recipes and placed in food bars for students, said David Lahey, food services director for The Ann Arbor Public Schools. It was expanded this spring to three days per week at Tappan and will eventually be rolled out to other schools in the coming years, Lahey said.

The new approach will mean a “more Mediterranean approach” to cooking, Lahey said. “It will be a lot more hands-on cooking, taking salt away and adding spices to bring the flavors back,” he said.

Lahey said the fresh fruit and vegetable intake by students more than doubled in the second year of the program and it is growing by the year.

“Even if you don’t buy lunch, you can have the salad bar with fresh fruits and fresh vegetables,” he said. “The kids are very demanding. They want the fresh produce. They’re eating the pizza, but they’re also going to the salad bar and eating the

broccoli and vegetables.”

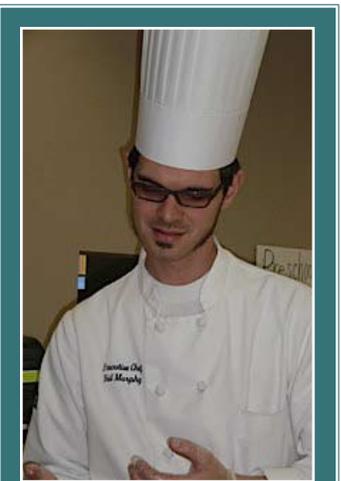
As part of this initiative, “wellness champions” are assigned to each building to encourage students to try new things and volunteers offer students samples to that end.

A healthy overall impact

Encouraging healthy eating can have a huge impact in a large district like Ann Arbor, Lahey said. Ann Arbor Public Schools serves between 5,000 and 7,000 students each day, representing between 40 and 50 percent of the student population

The Agrarian Adventure’s Trumbell called the current movement toward healthy produce in The Ann Arbor Public Schools unique. “It’s very significant that they are bringing in local food and devoting resources to doing it,” she said.

Sara Aeschbach, director of Community Education & Recreation for the district, serves on the district’s Wellness Committee and has been involved with the Farm-to-School Program, as well. She said both the Agrarian garden and the Chartwells



Visit us online for a profile of Neil Murphy, executive chef for The Ann Arbor Public Schools who does the meal planning for school cafeterias and also conducts cooking demonstrations and gives meal planning tips to parents on a fixed income, as he does here at the Preschool & Family Center.

Fresh Days program are important to teaching students about good health.

“We’re really trying to get kids to enjoy produce,” she said. “We’re trying to get kids to taste new things. I think these new initiatives support this.”

Chartwells has instituted several other programs to assist families learn healthier eating habits. At Mitchell Elementary School, backpacks are filled with food that 15-20 children take home on Fridays with enough food to get a family through the weekend, Lahey said. They also do offer cooking demos and healthy eating tips at the Preschool & Family Center when families get food from Food Gatherers.