

# AAPSNews

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

**Inside:** Principal Gerald Vazquez takes the reins at Scarlett Middle School, page 2  
• Ann Arbor Civic Chorus a long-standing program for district, page 3

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## Keeping warm

Fifth-graders in Rose Giach-erio's Eberwhite Elementary class create scarves for the Delonis Center and blankets for the Washtenaw County chapter of Project Linus. See story on page 4.

Issue No. 8, February 15, 2010

## Innovation at Skyline begins in classroom

### Featured story

From AAPSNews Service

Skyline High School is clearly different. Its building is environmentally friendly. Its programs include academic magnets and student "neighborhoods."

Ann Arbor's newest school was built as part of a \$255 million Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (2004 Bond and 2005 Sinking Fund) approved by voters after a survey showed residents preferred a third, comprehensive high school to expanding Pioneer and Huron. Skyline opened in 2008 with only ninth-graders who will be the school's first graduating class. By fall 2011, the school will have four full grades and the district will have worked to balance student populations between its three comprehensive high school programs.

Principal Sulura Jackson said the building was designed around the program, which makes it unique. "The vision was developed before the building was designed," said Jackson. "Usually the building is built and we are told to make it work. We did this one in the right order."

The school is on trimesters and uses a "mastery" approach to teaching and learning. If students do not reach an 80 percent level of mastery of an objective, it is retaught and students are given another opportunity. Teachers work



**VISIT US ONLINE:** Countywide "NAAPID at Night" event at Skyline called a success.

*Sophomores at Skyline work in a science lab, doing physics projects.*



*Skyline science teacher Kathe Blue Hetter works with sophomores in the ACIS2 physics class lab, where they learn about prisms and light. Students will soon be able to take an environmental/green chemistry class – the first such class in the state.*

together in interdisciplinary teams from various subject areas - different from the traditional approach where teachers work in departments, Jackson said. "Here (at Skyline,) we put our egos aside."

Skyline is also the only one of the district's three main high schools to offer open enrollment; about 125 students are accepted through the open enrollment process each year, Jackson said.

*See Skyline, page 2*

## No flap here Leslie Center bald eagle is Skyline mascot

Skyline High School has a real-life bald eagle as a learning friend.

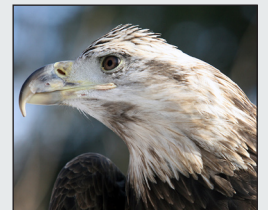
Leanne Chadwick, a raptor educator at the Leslie Science and Nature Center ([lesliesnc.org](http://lesliesnc.org)), has three children in the Ann Arbor district, including a daughter at Skyline and sons at Forsythe Middle School and Wines Elementary. She spotted an opportunity for both Skyline and the nature center, which devotes its mission to working in the schools and with children who visit the center on Traver Road.

That opportunity came in the form of a female bald eagle, which lives at the Ann Arbor center and visits Skyline as part of the school's educational program.

"Skyline is the only school in the area to have a living raptor partnership," said Chadwick. The eagle came to the first home football game at Skyline and also has been part of classroom activities in leadership, physics, public policy and also came to a student assembly where several hundred students viewed her. She recently was part of Curriculum Night at Skyline, where 400 people, including incoming freshmen, were able to view and experience the bird.

Chadwick said some of the eagle's lessons can apply to students. "For her survival in the wild, she has to be the best that she can be," she explained. "She has to eat right, sleep right. We

*See Eagle, page 4*



## Staff in the Spotlight: Gerald Vazquez

### Scarlett principal loves working with kids

From AAPSNews Service

When Gerald Vazquez graduated from The University of Michigan with a major in communications, little did he think he would someday be in education – much less as a school principal.

But that's the way he went, thanks to opportunities, a good mentor who nudged him in that direction and many other people who encouraged him along the way.

"I'm fortunate," he said. "My journey is paved with a lot of help."

Now a Saline resident, he has spent much of his educational career in the Detroit Public Schools. He came to Ann Arbor in mid-December to take the reins at Scarlett Middle School – one of the few schools he said he would leave Detroit to lead.

"I love the work," he said. "I like looking at situations and how we can create a win-win. And we always can."

A New Jersey native who was raised in southwest Detroit, Vazquez was active on the U-M campus with New Life Church and thought he might take up mission work. But a principal in Detroit had other ideas. The now-retired Rosa Williams hired him as an at-risk counselor and truant officer and he was hooked.

"She told me 'you need to go back to school and get certified. You're going to be a principal'," said the soft-spoken Vazquez, who thrives on a challenge and enjoys working equally with parents, staff and students. "I knew she really cared about me."

"If she believed you were doing the right thing for kids, she would let you try," he said of Williams. "And that is my mantra today – I will shout it from the rooftops."

He earned his master's degree in teaching at Wayne State University and quickly became entrenched in the schools as a curriculum leader for bilingual education, then an eight-grade guidance counselor, then a middle school principal at Detroit's



Gerald Vazquez in the hallway at Scarlett Middle School. Vazquez started as the school's new principal in mid-December. He most recently worked for the Detroit Public Schools.

#### Gerald Vazquez

**Occupation:** Principal at Scarlett Middle School.

**Residence:** Saline.

**Education:** Undergraduate degree in communications and marketing from The University of Michigan; a master's degree in teaching from Wayne State University. Additional coursework in educational leadership.

**Age:** 42.

**Family:** Married to Alicia. They have three children: Drew, 12,

Max, 10, and Ali, 13 months.

**Pet:** A dog, Tillie, a Labradoodle.

**Hobbies:** Enjoys coaching baseball, plays golf.

**Community service:** Active in New Life Church on The University of Michigan campus.

**Favorite meal:** "The best food is Italian. I love my friend's Mama Pape's spaghetti and meatballs."

**Last book read:** Mitch Albom's "Have a Little Faith"

**Life philosophy:** "If it's going to be funny later, it's going to be funny now."

Earhart Middle School, serving for 14 years. In his final months in Detroit, he was moved to the principal's post at Western International High School.

Vazquez is the youngest of five children who was raised with "tons of love, in a great, faith-filled family," he said. "We were poor. We struggled, but love and strong values got us through. Each of us learned the value of a hard day's work."

Southwest Detroit is a hub for Spanish-speaking families and working there was a coming home for Vazquez. Earhart School has a 75 percent Latino population, he said.

Being at Scarlett "is a lot like

being down there because of the diversity of the population" he added. "I feel right at home and have been made to feel welcome by everybody."

He replaces Edward Broom, who remains as assistant principal at and who served as interim until Vazquez was hired. The two worked together in Detroit and have many of the same philosophies, he said.

Although his career path proved to be a surprise for Vazquez, he has always listened to his heart.

"I believe the big guy upstairs wires you with some DNA and some unique qualities," he said. "Mine is to work with kids."

## Skyline, from page 1

Because of that, the school represents a cross section of the city. "We represent all areas of Ann Arbor," she said.

#### Unique approach to learning

Those who work at Skyline believe their approach will help students develop according to the schools motto: "Agile Minds, Big Hearts, Deep Questions."

In Kathe Blue Hetter's (ACIS 2 Accelerated Integrated Science) physics class, sophomores on a are learning about lasers, colors, lights and prisms. Following a few discussion questions, teams moved to lab tables where they worked together on various experiments and conclusions.

Hetter came to Skyline after teaching at Community High School for 14 years. She said she was excited about what a new school could offer to students and was drawn to creating a new approach to learning. "It was a whole clean slate to start with," she said. "We made the (state) standards work for us. They didn't control us."

Hetter said she likes the focus on student progress. "It all comes down to what's best and what works for kids," she said. "We all have to remember that it's a work in progress."

Skyline's four magnet programs – in Business, Marketing and Information Technology; Communication, Media and Public Policy; Design Technology and Environmental Planning; and Health and Medicine. – have been a draw.

Sophomore Jeffrey Robbins, said he was disappointed not to be picked via lottery for the health magnet. As an athlete, he is interested in pursuing a possible career in physical therapy and he thinks there should be a different way to select students, such as GPA. "But I can take the classes as electives. I might as well try them all and see what I like," he said.

Fellow sophomore Patrick Conway is in the design magnet. It was one of the reasons he came to Skyline, he said. "I like it," said Conway. "There's a lot of hands-on. You get to build," he said.

Sara Duvall, lead teacher for media and technology, also came aboard to

See Skyline, next page



### Skyline, from previous page

help design the program. “The Skyline thing caught me,” she said, adding that the school was set up with an entrepreneurial focus. “We should be leading our profession,” she said. “We have to be cutting edge, pushing ourselves hard.”

Duvall said the school’s approach is to “assure goodwill” in relationships be they with students, staff or the parent community. “At this school, you have to set your ego over here,” she said. “It’s not about you, it’s about the student.”

#### A certified ‘green’ school

Jackson said Skyline’s design with lots of natural light offers a healthier environment. “It keeps us all connected,” the principal said. “We hear, we see things through multiple floors.”

Students spend much of their day in core classes that are conducted in small learning communities, or neighborhoods. Jackson said these help students and teachers stay connected and don’t allow students to get lost in a large school. “You don’t get to hide here,” she added.

Skyline’s design is LEED silver certified – an independent, third-party green building rating that stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

“It is the largest silver-certified high school in the country,” said Randy Trent, the district’s executive director for physical properties.

Skyline sits on a 109-acre parcel that is about 60 percent developed. The undeveloped portion of the property is encouraging student study as well as partnerships with the city of Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan studying animal habitats on site, Trent said.

“As the program with the number of students grows, the knowledge of the whole building will expand,” he said. “The more that it’s used, the awareness will spread more and more.”

Trent said the building is 42 percent more efficient than a standard building. It uses a geo-exchange system for heating and cooling, a storm water system that captures runoff to use for irrigating athletic fields and landscaping and has sensors for lights and heating that adjust depending on how spaces are being used. Floors are made from recycled rubber, which cuts down on noise.

To maintain LEED certification, custodial staff uses green cleaning products, Trent said – something that the district is now doing throughout all school buildings.

On another green note, Skyline will soon offer the first Sustainable/Green Chemistry course in the state, something Hetter said ties in nicely with the school’s green approach to operating and teaching.

## Chorus blends voices, camaraderie

### Dozens join weekly choral group Mondays at Slauson Middle School

By Casey Hans  
AAPSNews Service

When Evan Padgitt is away from his singing, he admits “there’s something missing.” The Ann Arbor resident sings in multiple choral groups, including the 27-year-old Ann Arbor Civic Chorus each fall and winter.

“There’s something about music that relaxes and releases stress,” said Padgitt, who has participated in the Civic Chorus since 1991, and said during the summer months “I get a little crabby without it.”

The other thing that keeps him coming back, he said, are the friendships that develop over time.

Run by the Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Education and Recreation Department, the program has offered Ann Arbor-area residents a chance to sing their hearts out since 1983. It is run as a class, costing \$185 per year for residents or \$215 per year for non-residents. Singers can also sign up by semester for \$95 for residents or \$114 for non-residents.

Although the 60-member chorus is a longstanding tradition in Ann Arbor, this year it has a new musical director, Linda Jones, a new accompanist, Ted Wyman, and several new voices.

“I love it – It’s ideal for me,” said Jones, an Ypsilanti Public Schools music teacher who also has served as a choir director at several area churches and teaches private voice, piano and guitar lessons. “It gives people in the community a chance to come together who enjoy singing. My goal is to help the singers improve their singing – their tonal production. I want them to work well together, to sing well together.”

She called the group “the most committed, proactive group of singers I’ve ever been with.”

Jones has gotten comfortable quickly, said Linda Brzezinski, community service supervisor for Community Education and Recreation, who coordinates the program. “She’s willing to work with just about anybody.”

Ruth Kenny founded the group and directed it for seven years. Rebecca Vlisides then took over, directing the group for 19 years before stepping down last spring. “We owe a lot to Rebecca, but Linda has put her own special stamp on it,” Padgitt added.

Singers range in age and Brzezinski said anyone 18 and older with some previous choral background can become part of the chorus.

Another longtime member is Mary Beth Seiler who has been with the group since 1990. “It’s a



Members of the Ann Arbor Civic Chorus rehearse Monday nights at Slauson Middle School.

#### Civic Chorus Spring Concert

**When:** 3 p.m., Sunday, April 25

**Where:** Forsythe Middle School Auditorium, 1655 Newport Road.

**Cost:** Free.

**Details:** <http://reced.aaps.k12.mi.us>

**Other:** The chorus rehearses weekly on Mondays from 7-9 p.m. at Slauson Middle School. Light classical pieces, standards, and selections from the Broadway stage are performed. Placement interviews are required to participate; call Linda Jones at (734) 761-2497.

fun group,” she said. The enjoyment “becomes the people after such a long time. But it’s the music too. I call it my therapy.”

Soprano Liz Houts had not had a singing outlet since graduating from college five years ago. She tried singing with the University Musical Society, but said the group was too large for her liking. She thinks the Civic Chorus will provide what she’s looking for. “I have high hopes,” she said.

The chorus performs two free concerts each year: One in December and the other in the spring. “I think the whole point of community education is to create an opportunity for the community to enrich themselves in some way,” Brzezinski added. “This is the perfect example of that. We’ve been able to give the chorus a long, ongoing life.”

Visit us online: *Ann Arbor woman’s blog about “Glee” draws national spotlight to Ann Arbor Civic Chorus.*

# 5th-graders warming things up for Project Linus

From AAPSNews Service

**R**ose Giacherio's fifth-graders have found a way to warm the world, one blanket at a time. The students recently completed 13 no-sew blankets and many more scarves that they will donate to two local groups. The blankets will go to Project Linus and the scarves will go to Delonis Center, a homeless shelter in the city.

Giacherio said her Eberwhite Elementary students decided where to donate their blankets. "We brainstormed charities and then we voted on them," explained Ella, one of the students involved with the project. "We had to do things around Ann Arbor."

Giacherio got the blanket-making idea a couple of years ago after spending some time in the hospital. While in recovery, she awoke to discover a hand-made blanket over her. Last year was the first time she had her students create blankets, which were given to a hospice program.

This year, the students will give them to a recently formed local chapter of Project Linus. Left-over material is being transformed into scarves for the Delonis Center. Giacherio said she got the pattern for making the blankets on the Project



*Fifth-graders work on no-sew blankets for Project Linus in Rose Giacherio's class.*

Linus Web page. The no-sew pattern is made of fleece, with fringe cut and knotted.

Teams of four students each had a \$16 budget to spend for materials. Armed with a discount coupon at JoAnn Fabrics, the teams selected their colors and patterns and then got on with the blanket making.

Giacherio said the project teaches students math skills – they had to figure out how much material they could get for the money – as well as measuring and cutting when making their blankets. They also had to discuss the project and work together

as a team in making it.

"We do life skills, talk about making a difference in the county," she said. "This is the kind of thing that makes a difference."

Students rolled the blankets, tied them with ribbon and put personalized tags on each of them before making their donation.

Project Linus (Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County) formed in December and has already received donations of more than 2,000 blankets.

Chapter Coordinator Monique Sluymers is looking for assistant chapter coordinators to help receive, label and distribute blankets and to seek out local organizations that might be recipients of donated blankets.

Sluymers said other volunteers sew on labels, check for pins to make sure they are ready to go, and then sort and bag the blankets by size.

Anyone interested in volunteering for Project Linus in Washtenaw County can e-mail Sluymers at [a2projectlinus@gmail.com](mailto:a2projectlinus@gmail.com).

As part of the new group's blanket donation efforts, they are shipping 1,000 blankets to the relief effort in Haiti, she added.

*On the Web:*

<http://a2projectlinus.blogspot.com>  
[www.projectlinus.org](http://www.projectlinus.org)

## Eagle, from page 1

try to use the eagle as a mascot for (student) behavior."

The partnership is paid for through fundraising donations specific to that program, Chadwick said, adding that since bald eagles can live for 50 years in captivity "hopefully, this relationship will be there for many years."

"My goal is so that every population in Skyline can have access to her," she said.

She is one of 15 birds of prey that are kept at the Leslie Center via a partnership with the River Raisin Raptor center. They will live out their lives there, as birds who are injured and cannot be let back in the wild. Or, as in this eagle's case, birds who bonded with humans as a newborn and cannot adjust to a life in the wild.

Like all raptors at the Leslie center, the bald eagle is not named because she is wild and not a pet,



*The Leslie Science and Nature Center eagle – the live "mascot" for Ann Arbor's Skyline High School – spends time with a group of students. Staff include, at far left, Leanne Chadwick, also a Skyline parent, and at far right raptor specialist Francie Krawcke. Students in random order include: Zach Jackson, Evan Anderson, Walker Upchurch, Rivers Upchurch, Jordan Jones, Jack Clark, Madi Chadwick and Jackie Morrow.*

said Raptor Specialist Francie Krawcke. This bald eagle was found in Wisconsin where she had a broken leg and wing and tendon issues with her wings. Because she was found young, she "imprinted" herself as a human so relates well to her handlers

and the students and is ideally suited to be taken into classrooms, the handlers said.

Krawcke spends much of her time taking the eagle to local schools, for which the center normally charges a \$200 fee.

Chadwick's childhood led her to an interest in raptors. She grew up in Kansas and Missouri where her parents would take the family out to scout for bald eagles. She worked at a raptor center in Colorado before moving around the globe with her family and eventually coming to Michigan to live in Ann Arbor, where she said bald eagles can sometimes be seen around the Huron River. "I'm particularly partial to eagles," she added.

And, since the Leslie Center's bald eagle is only three years old now, she is growing up with the current crop of Skyline students, an added plus for the partnership.

"It's a new school. When the first class graduates (including Chadwick's daughter)," she said. "she'll be a mature bird, just like them."

*Visit the Leslie Science and Nature Center at 1831 Traver Road, call 734-997-1553 or visit on the Web: [www.lesliesnc.org](http://www.lesliesnc.org)*