

# KCIS Connections

Kalamazoo Communities In Schools Newsletter

May 2009

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## From the Executive Director

by Pam Kingery

Recently, I attended the STAR Awards, the longstanding community salute to volunteers that was founded and is sustained by the Kalamazoo Gazette and the Volunteer Center of Greater Kalamazoo. It is among my favorite days of the year and I make it a point to attend as a regular boost to my own mental health and well-being.

You think the judges on American Idol have a tough time? Imagine being one of the judges for the STAR Awards, who sift through hundreds of nominations filled with inspiring examples of the ways in which volunteers improve the quality of life for others and for our entire community.

Many organizations, KCIS included, nominate individuals, groups or organizations who have made outstanding contributions toward their missions. This year, our nominees included:

- **Valerie Denghel** for creating and sustaining the First Day Shoe Fund to provide K-2 school with a new pair of shoes to start the school year. Directed at students who qualify for free and reduced price lunches, Denghel's program has provided hundreds of pairs of shoes to KPS summer school students. The Fund also helps KCIS provide shoes during the school year to meet urgent needs.

- **Employees of Chase Bank** for their mentoring and tutoring at King-Westwood Elementary School. This group of employees, including President Darren Timmeney, is committed to the "adopt-a-school" strategy for addressing a range of needs in a hands-on way throughout the school year.
- **Steve Terranella**, an individual volunteer, was nominated jointly with Kalamazoo Central High School, where he has provided math tutoring faithfully for several years. Mr. Terranella, an engineer, began volunteering at Kalamazoo Central the week following his retirement and he hasn't stopped since. AGA Director Patricia Carlin, who authored the nomination, is among Mr. Terranella's fans.

KCIS has so many volunteers to thank. Most we know. Others make a faint footprint by donating basic needs items such as toothbrushes, winter coats, or school supplies at a National City/PNC branch. Yesterday, I found myself thanking those nameless volunteers who have provided items of clothing to help students stay in school and succeed.

Recently, one of our Site Coordinators stopped by to drop something off and recounted her morning. A ten-year-old girl stopped by her office crying uncontrollably, refusing to go to class. Her world had shattered the day before---her family became homeless. She was wearing the same clothes she had worn the day before, and had slept in them all night. She was certain other students would make fun of her for wearing the same dirty clothes and she was prepared to skip class to avoid this. Because of the generosity of donors to the KCIS "basic needs" program, the Site Coordinator was able to provide a complete set of clothing to the girl with an agreement that she would return to class and focus on her school work the remainder of the day. I hope that her family's homelessness will be short-lived and that her world will re-stabilize. In the meantime, however, our community has helped us help her to stay in school and focus on academics as an investment in a better future.

## May First Fridays: Summer Clothes and Games



You can help the students of Kalamazoo Public Schools this month by donating summer clothes and toys or games that encourage learning or fitness. Suggested donations include new t-shirts, shorts, tank tops, flashcards, board games, sidewalk chalk, balls, hula hoops, jump ropes, and craft activities.

*Where to donate:* Items can be donated at the KPS Administration Building (1220 Howard) or at the following Kalamazoo area National City branches: **Crosstown, Downtown, Gull Road, Oakland, West Main, Stadium, or Oshtemo**. Please note that KCIS is unable to accept donations of used items. To donate used clothes, or other goods, please contact Goodwill of Southwest Michigan at 269-382-0490.

For more information, please visit the "Give to KCIS" section of our website ([www.kcis.us](http://www.kcis.us)), or contact Helen Walls at [hwalls@kcis.us](mailto:hwalls@kcis.us) or 337-1601 x212.

Photo (Left to Right): Parkwood-Upjohn Elementary students Bobby Gaddie, Arian Solis, Drucilla Robinson, Joshua Wilson, Maggie Swafford, and Ross VanKirk

**Grant Update** The Harbeck and Hamilton grant recipients announcement slated to be in this month's newsletter will instead appear in June's issue to allow staff to share the impact of the awards with you.

## KCIS Gardening Programs Bring the Classroom Outside



*A Lincoln student places mulch beside the new redbud tree, donated by the Southwest Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association*

### *Lincoln International Studies School*

On Wednesday April 22, a second grade classroom at Lincoln Elementary went outside to enjoy the sunshine and to participate in a tree-planting ceremony marking the launch of Lincoln's garden program, led by KCIS Americorps VISTA Amolia Moore. The tree, a redbud, was donated to the school by the Southwest Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association's "Plant Michigan Green" program, and was planted by local landscapers Michelle and Jake Grevenstuk and John Pawlak. Three students shared journal entries they'd written about being outside in nature. The students then helped the landscapers place soil and mulch, then watered the new tree.

On the following Sunday, 19 students, families, and friends gathered at the school. Volunteers cleaned the site, then builders constructed nine beautiful raised flower beds while others turned the soil, weeded the spring flower bed, and planted day lilies. Students enjoyed hammering in stakes, shoveling soil, and sanding the edges of the beds. Students in the Lincoln Recess Gardening Club have already started red and yellow cherry tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, and cabbage seeds indoors, and will soon be able to plant them outside in the new garden. Lincoln will also be offering summer gardening workshops to keep the neighborhood students involved and to keep the plants alive!

Amolia would like to thank Mr. Richard Craig, Julia Dean, Ashley Bishop, Jenny Dozema, Heather Crull, Principal Kimberly Parker-DeVauld, and all who participated in the garden's construction. Funding for the project is provided by a grant from Bread for the Journey of Southwest Michigan.

### *King-Westwood Elementary*

Things are blooming at King Westwood! On April 18, a crowd of KCIS staff, students, parents, and dogs arrived at King-Westwood Elementary to kickoff the school's first garden project. The sun shone brightly as a dump truck backed to the rear of the school and created a Ford Fusion-sized pile of dirt! Nearly 50 people turned out to construct seven flower beds, fill them with dirt and mulch, and finish the garden area with a few layers of cocoa shell mulch.

The garden project is more than just a few squares of dirt. What happened that afternoon was the visible growth of connections between school and community. Neighbors brought shovels and wheelbarrows. Adults took the time to help students learn how to use power drills. People were given shovels, and before long, the dirt pile was reduced to the size of a matchbox car.

More than just a garden was built that day. A sense of community brought together a group of people who could have been doing anything else on the first warm spring day, but all pitched in to help.

Over the next several weeks, King-Westwood students will begin planting their sections of the garden beds. In addition to growing vegetables and flowers, some classes will also be creating stepping stones to help decorate the area. This summer, students and families will be encouraged to meet up at the garden on Tuesday nights to help water, weed, and harvest.

The garden project was developed by 2008-09 KCIS Americorps VISTA Chris McGuire, and the project is funded by a Kalamazoo Community Foundation Good Neighbor Grant. This project will continue to provide a variety of learning opportunities for students and the neighborhood surrounding King-Westwood Elementary.

## Celebration Breakfasts Engage Parents

On March 6, the KCIS Parent Engagement team hosted a Celebration Breakfast at Milwood Elementary School. The goal of the event was to reward students for overall high performance or improvements in behavior or academics, and to recognize those students along with their parents. The event was designed to implement the positive communication principle of the Positive Behavior and Literacy Supports (PBLs) parent strategy, by providing teachers and staff with one way to communicate positive messages to parents about their children. PBLs is a proven approach to creating a supportive structure in the home and/or community that promotes positive behavior.

Milwood teachers and some staff were asked to nominate a student to receive an award. The student must either have shown consistent high performance or have made improvements in behavior or academics. Students and parents gathered in the school cafeteria, where parents proudly watched their children receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement. Breakfast was served following the awards. The first Celebration Breakfast was held in 2008 at Woodward Elementary. Both events have been highly successful and KCIS hopes to host more Celebration Breakfasts in the future.

For more information, please contact Kirsten Jennings, KCIS Director of Parent Involvement and Social/Emotional Learning, at 337-1601 x205 or at [kjennings@kcis.us](mailto:kjennings@kcis.us).



*King-Westwood Kindergarten student Kawyie Cooper stands at the garden site*

## KCIS Reaches Campaign Goal

Lately, opening the newspaper or turning on the television news can sometimes be discouraging. There are stories of companies closing, unemployment figures rising, and health benefits lost. However, if you look hard enough, you will also find news stories that are full of inspiration and hope, about communities coming together, or about individuals making sacrifices in order to help those in need.

In the hope of sharing one such story, Kalamazoo Communities In Schools is extremely happy to announce we have commitments that exceed the \$2.7 million goal of our advancement campaign, *A Promise in the Making*. We would like to offer those who were a part of this campaign our deepest thanks for making the success and well-being of all children in our community a priority, even during these times of economic uncertainty. This support enables KCIS to fulfill our mission: to champion the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for life.

The past year has been one of growth for KCIS. In the fall of 2008, we adopted the National Communities In Schools (CIS) model for Integrated Student Services (ISS). This means that we now function as a data-driven, needs-based organization, assessing individual and school-wide needs. After a needs assessment is complete, KCIS recruits community resources that will meet the identified needs. The ISS model is proven to be an effective and evidence-based approach to improving 4th and 8th grade reading and math proficiency, decreasing the dropout rate, and improving the graduation rate.

In alignment with National CIS, KCIS has established anticipated outcomes of improving reading, writing, math, attendance and behavior. We do this not only through academic supports, such as mentoring and tutoring, but also through health care, dental care, eyeglasses, mental health, literacy programming, parent engagement, after-school care, and by providing food, clean clothing, hygiene items, and more.

Please consider joining KCIS during the next few months as we host a variety of information sessions to connect community members with an active understanding of how we provide services to schools and students through the ISS model. If you have any questions, or would like to schedule a guided tour of a KCIS site, please contact Brooke Buys, KCIS Director of Development, at 337-1601 x209 or at [bnbuys@kcis.us](mailto:bnbuys@kcis.us).

### Featured Partner: Kalamazoo Public Library

KCIS would like to thank the Kalamazoo Public Library for their ongoing support and engagement in programs to benefit KPS students.

This March, KPL staff created extensive lists of book suggestions for each grade level, making it easy for donors to choose books that would be interesting and engaging to the students. KPS also provided book bags for every student, which included information about the library and a bookmark.

In April, KPL children's librarians kept copies of *I Know I Can* on hand so volunteers participating in College Awareness Week could prepare in advance for reading this book to groups of second graders. KPL staff are also consistent contributors to the First Fridays program.

Thank you, KPL, for ensuring that students are inspired to continue reading!

## The RAVE Focuses on College Awareness

KCIS has partnered with KPS and the RAVE Motion Pictures Cityplace 14 for three years to bring an event called Planning for College to high school students who do not take the ACT/MME college preparation test. KCIS brings a variety of representatives from colleges and universities throughout the state and from the military service to the RAVE theatre so that students can learn more about the possibilities available to them after graduation. All those who attend receive a free movie pass from the RAVE. When the event started in 2007, 12 students attended. In 2008, 27 came. This year saw more than 120 students speaking with representatives, filling out applications, listening to presentations, and watching informative movies.

The RAVE's commitment to education is a result of the efforts of Natalie Sherhart, the theatre's General Manager. Sherhart, who previously worked with special needs students and in vocational education, believes that community involvement in education plays an important role in student success.

"It makes a difference when businesses get behind the public school system," said Sherhart. "Education is the bigger picture. In this day, you can't be successful without a college or trade degree. The Planning for College event gives students an opportunity to see what's out there."

The Planning for College event is a great example of the wide spectrum of opportunities for local businesses to get involved. The only limit is how creative you can be. Many local businesses offer their employees one hour per week of paid volunteer time. Others do internal donation drives for books, clothes, or school supplies. Others choose a school and employees volunteer as a group. Others hire interns from KPS, to give students hands-on work experience, or make presentations about their profession in classrooms. Sherhart's event is an excellent example of two other possibilities—either hosting events that raise awareness, or donating products (such as the movie passes she distributes to draw students into the event) to be used as incentives.

For more information about business engagement opportunities, please contact Brooke Nobis Buys, KCIS Director of Development & Business Engagement, at 269-337-1601 or at [bnbuys@kcis.us](mailto:bnbuys@kcis.us).



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We're on the Web!  
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## An International Perspective on Volunteering *by Gisa Ruediger-Rathmachers*

I work as a school psychologist in Berlin, Germany. I have been here in Kalamazoo with the Council of International Programs, which is funded by the government of Germany and Colleagues International of Kalamazoo.

I volunteered for more than two months at Arcadia Elementary School and worked closely with Gulnar Husain, the Site Coordinator of KCIS. I helped on a regular basis in the Peep, Kindergarten, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms. I supported students in reading, math, and behavior in a one-on-one situation.

I would like to tell you some differences I noticed between elementary schools in Germany and here in Kalamazoo:

- I appreciated the open classroom doors; you can see what is happening in the classroom at all times.
- I really enjoyed the principal's daily morning "words of wisdom" to the students.
- I saw a very close cooperation between the school and the local Universities and Colleges. Their college students are tutors, pre-interns, and interns in classrooms working together with the teachers. On the one side, the students of the school get help and on the other, the college students get an early experience in the field they want to work in.
- Letters, sounds, and rhyming words are introduced earlier here than in Germany, and students start reading in Kindergarten, even in the Peep Program.
- There is a set of school-wide specific and clear expectations that every student is supposed to follow at all times in the building, e.g., how to behave in class, in the hallways, in the cafeteria, at recess. The five STARS qualities: self-control, teamwork, affirmation, responsibility, and safety, are known by everyone, and students are rewarded for achieving them. At Arcadia, students are taught very early to be responsible for themselves and for the community. You put the decision of choosing what is right or wrong in the minds of the students. If there are students failing, the staff looks for support to help improve their scores.
- Schools are open to the community and get outside support through Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, raising the competence of students in academics and in behavior, while also helping fulfill their basic needs.



*Gisa Ruediger-Rathmachers (left)  
with KCIS Arcadia Site Coordinator  
Gulnar Husain.*

In my opinion a close network in the school and community and an esteemed cooperation with parents is necessary to bring students to take advantage of The Kalamazoo Promise. I would like to say thank you to Mrs. Van Erkel and all the staff who answered my questions with passion.