

Gordon Parks Snapshots



Year 10, No. 1

www.gordonparks.org

October 2008

“Night School”

An Evening Under The Stars Deserves An A+

It was a night to remember when more than 350 Gordon Parks supporters gathered on the school's front lawn to dine, visit, tour the classrooms and celebrate a decade of devotion to the charter school.



Davidson Cohen, Honorary Chairwoman, who began her education career 50 years ago teaching in the Kansas City Missouri School District. In 2002, Dr. Cohen was appointed the U.S. Secretary of Education's Region VII

representative, overseeing the Department's activities in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska.

Dr. Cohen believes schools like Gordon Parks are on the cutting edge of education and will become the wave of the future. In her address to the crowd, she said, "Children are like violins -- they come into the world formed, but we must tune them."

Music and Fireworks

Bird Fleming's African drummers and dancers entertained -- attracting not only the guests but residents from neighboring apartments. 5th Grade Ambassadors greeted guests and invited them to take the Gold Star Discovery Tour where they learned about school programs and could register to win prizes.

Once the sun went down, the candle lighting ceremony began, honoring the event's major underwriting sponsors, the school's volunteers, staff and students. As each of the 10 giant lawn candles were lit, an explosion of fireworks shot from the roof of the school into the nighttime sky.

Barbara Haviland and Tami Sutton chaired the fundraiser extravaganza, which grossed more than \$190,000 for the charter school.

Also celebrating an anniversary was Dr. Mary

Volunteers Enhance The School

The charter school would be unable to provide all its services to its students without help from volunteers. Among those attending the event was Camdon Fells who has been a volunteer at the school for two years, sharing his financial expertise and entrepreneurship with the 5th grade boys. (Cont'd on pg. 2) **1**

Under The Stars (cont'd from pg. 1)

"I remember how much I benefited from community professionals who came into my classrooms when I was in school," said Camdon, a graduate of the Kansas City School District who earned an economics degree at UMKC. "As a product of the urban core myself, I feel that by teaching the boys about money and budgeting, I can serve as a positive influence for our future adults."



Enjoying the festivities are Camdon Fells, financial advisor at Wachovia Securities, and Dr. Dorether M. Welch, sociologist at Penn Valley Community College. Top right: Honorary Chairwoman Dr. Mary Davidson Cohen lights a Gordon Parks birthday candle.



Melissa Mosher, board member representing Operation Breakthrough, greets Student Ambassador Tahniece Brown.

Volunteers and Donations Needed For the Holiday Bazaar



Volunteers needed to staff the Holiday store.

Excitement reigns on the day students line up to buy gifts at the 5th grade Holiday Bazaar. No child leaves the sale without presents for family members. Proceeds from the Bazaar help fund the 5th Grade Washington D.C. Trip. Bring donations to the school any time, marked "Attention Pat Mallory, volunteer coordinator."

Suggested Gift Items: Gift bags, tissue paper, wrapping paper, 2009 calendars, perfume, cologne, lotions, fancy soaps, coffee mugs, stuffed animals, jewelry, hats, gloves, scarves, purses, vases, candles (new), picture frames, key chains, board games and puzzles, photo albums, stationary, pen sets, toys, slippers, hot chocolate, coffees, teas, cookbooks, journals, DVDs, CDs and coloring books.

Development Director Seeks To Educate The Public

Keely Schneider-Truog sees her mission as Development Director as not only raising money for Gordon Parks, but also educating the public on the need to supplement available funds to assure quality education for each student.

"Some people remark, 'my taxes should be enough to support the school,' but in reality, tax money is not enough," she explained. "This year our fundraising budget is almost \$600,000. Transportation, food . . . everything is more expensive."

Keely Makes A Career Change

Although Keely has been on the job only four months, the former attorney has a "handle" on the needs of the school and how to achieve results. A native of Atlanta, Keely met her husband Toby when both were attending Davidson College in North Carolina. After graduation, Toby followed Keely when she moved back to Georgia to earn a JD degree at the University of Georgia Law School.

After the birth of daughter Harper, Keely realized there were not enough hours in the day to do justice to her clients at the corporate law firm and to her young family at home. She left her law career and joined her mother in the real estate consulting business, before moving to Kansas City seven years ago.

Learn more about Gordon Parks.

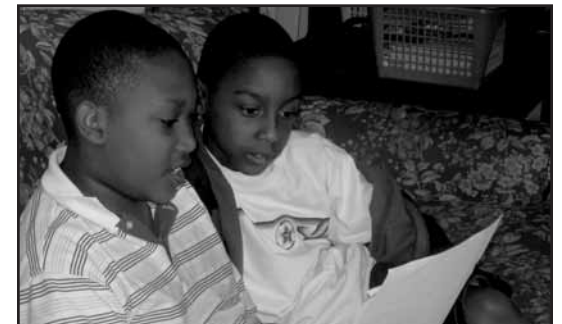
Take a Breakfast Learning Walk. Meet the teachers and observe the students at work and play. Call Keely: 816-931-8580 to schedule a tour.



Keely Schneider-Truog

"I welcomed the move and the opportunity to slow down," she recalled. "When I finally decided to return to the workplace full time, I knew it had to be meaningful. The non-profit field appealed to me because I'd done work with non-profits at the law firm. Now with both of my children in school -- Harper is in the 4th grade and Finnegan is in kindergarten -- it seemed like a perfect time to begin a new career."

When Keely is not out singing praises of Gordon Parks or shuttling kids around, she pursues her musical hobby, singing. She is a member of several choral groups and sings at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church.



Keely participated in the 4th grade Summer School Publishing Party.

Meet The New Faculty



Diana Costello 3rd Grade

Hurricane Katrina drove away half the population of flood-ravaged New Orleans, but Diana Costello stayed. The Wisconsin native, had studied at the University of Minnesota and the Kansas

City Art Institute, before being accepted by Teach for America, a national teaching program comprised of recent college graduates who commit two years to teach in under-resourced public schools.

"I'd been teaching first grade in a school on New Orleans' west bank when the hurricane hit," she recalled. "My school received only minor damage. I stayed because of my commitment to my school and its students."

It wasn't until Imani, now 17 months old, was born that Diana and her husband Joe realized their daughter needed to grow up in a safer environment -- thus the move to Kansas City.

Ann McManus Reading Specialist

Ann McManus has reinvented her teaching career from foreign language teacher to Reading Specialist. As a teacher of French and Spanish at St. Teresa's Academy and in the Kansas City Magnet schools, she escorted small groups of students to language immersion programs in Belgium and Spain.

When the district phased out the magnet school concept, Ann became a certified reading specialist. During her 28 years in Kansas City classrooms teaching students from kindergarten



to 12th grade, she recognized a need to improve students' reading and comprehension proficiency.

A graduate of Loretto Academy and Kansas University, Ann grew up with six siblings who enjoyed watching and participating in sports. Not long ago, Ann attended a sports convention where she stood in a long line hoping to get the opportunity to speak to Brandon Rush, KU basketball star and recent NBA draftee. After all, she'd been his teacher in the 4th grade at C.A. Franklin Elementary School.

Tamara Allen-Williams 5th Grade boys



Tamara Allen-Williams couldn't stop crying. Last spring, the Kansas City Catholic Diocese announced it was closing St. Monica's Parochial School due to declining enrollment. St. Monica's was her school -- she'd graduated from there as had her children ... and now she was on the faculty.

"I knew when I moved to another school, I wanted it to be supportive," said Tamara who has taught for 28 years. "Gordon Parks was so inviting. I knew I'd be O.K."

Tamara is not intimidated by a class full of 5th grade boys. She is the mother of two sons; her mother's seven grandchildren are all boys. Tamara loves her chosen career. At Gordon Parks, she plans to stress science and math studies, her favorite subjects, to the 18 young men in her classroom.

Several years ago, a student found Tamara's 8th grade autobiography filed in the school library. "I had no idea our autobiographies had been saved," she exclaimed. "I was even more surprised that at age 14, I'd written I wanted to be a teacher when I grew up."

Check Mate! The Chess Club Is Going Strong

Skills needed to function in the workplace today are decision making, problem solving, critical thinking and deductive reasoning -- that's when Chess comes into the picture.

Kids love chess and chess loves kids . . . and it's fun. Gordon Parks boasts a thriving Chess Club for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, organized and underwritten by Mary and Chuck Waldrop. Chuck was taking lessons from chess master Zeb Fortman when he asked his teacher if he'd introduce chess to students at Gordon Parks.

"I didn't think long before answering 'yes,'" said Zeb, who conducts classes for children and adults and had coached his son to become a championship player.

The after school chess lessons began last January in the school cafeteria and culminated in May with an Awards Ceremony. Trophies were given to the top girl and boy in each grade who'd



Left: Caleb Hopkins is a proud medal winner.

Below: Chuck Waldrop presents a trophy to Yoseline Palmas, winner of the most games among 4th grade girls.



won the most games during a three-day tournament. But everyone came out a winner. All the chess players received championship medals and portable chess sets.

The Chess Club regrouped this fall.

Summer School Sets Record Enrollment

From soap bubbles to seed growth, 190 students explored the wonders of science during the four-week Summer School session. Fourth graders studied plant and seed growth, wrote "Mystery Seed" stories and hosted a publishing party for their written work.

Second and 3rd graders introduced new kindergartners to African musical instruments. The joint session allowed older students to share their experiences with the school's newest students.

Vegetables are planted in raised beds in the late spring; harvested months later.



Seeing and Hearing A Difference

Experimental Therapies Help Some Schools Help Children To Focus



By: Greg Toppo, USA TODAY

A small but growing number of schools are using experimental therapies to retrain students' hearing and vision, in essence reteaching them to hear and see. It's a bid to reverse problems with the ability to focus and learn brought on by years of excessive TV, poor nutrition and, for some, in vitro drug exposure.

At Gordon Parks Elementary School, a charter school in Kansas City, Mo., 60% of kindergartners in 2004 failed a visual-skills test. Most had 20/20 vision, but they struggled to focus on moving objects, track lines of print and refocus from near to far.

That fall, Gordon Parks began regular lessons in visual skills. Therapist Cheryl Steffenella (pictured above, right) says

dangerous neighborhoods and the ubiquity of TV and video games mean many of her students "aren't doing kid things" -- climbing trees, jumping and running -- that help develop visual and motor skills. Even playing video games that require a lot of eye movement exercises children's vision minimally, she says.

Research on the health effects of TV and video games is, so far, inconclusive. The American Medical Association in 2007 noted that some research points to video games as a risk factor for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); other research suggests that video games can be "a useful treatment."

Top left: Students wear headphones to retrain hearing in the Tomatis program, guided by Helen Cesena.

Less ambiguous is medical research on prenatal exposure to drugs such as cocaine and heroin: it can result in visual, auditory, behavioral and other problems, such as slow visual reaction times, shorter attention spans and delayed language skills in children.

Nutrition research also shows, for instance, that children with an iron deficiency -- the most common nutritional deficiency, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- have a higher incidence of both hearing and vision problems.

Parks retrains many students' listening abilities as well, through lessons pioneered by French physician Alfred Tomatis. The sessions use students' voices and modified recordings of Mozart, played through headphones, to retrain the brain. By boosting high or low frequencies, the sessions help strengthen a child's ability to focus and hear a variety of sounds.

"If I'm mad, it'll calm me down," says Paige Burns, 9, a fourth-grader who spent three semesters in the listening sessions.

The techniques don't have a stamp of approval from the American Academy of Pediatrics or the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). "There really is no evidence to support using Tomatis," says Anne Oyler, ASHA's associate director of audiology professional practices. "The research is not consistent."

She says schools should keep meticulous records on results, but cautions: "The problems with some of these kids have to be identified very carefully; there's hardly a one-size-fits-all remediation approach."

Other schools that have adopted programs similar to Gordon Parks include:

* Grand Traverse Academy, a K-12 charter school in Traverse City, Mich. "We're giving (students) activities that help them visualize, to see with their minds -- see words, see meaning, predict," says Steven Ingersoll, the school's chief administrative officer.

* 27 districts in Missouri. Michael Flynn, executive director of Learning Insights, a non-profit working to bring the vision treatment to schools, says about 42% of Missouri kindergartners have inadequate vision.

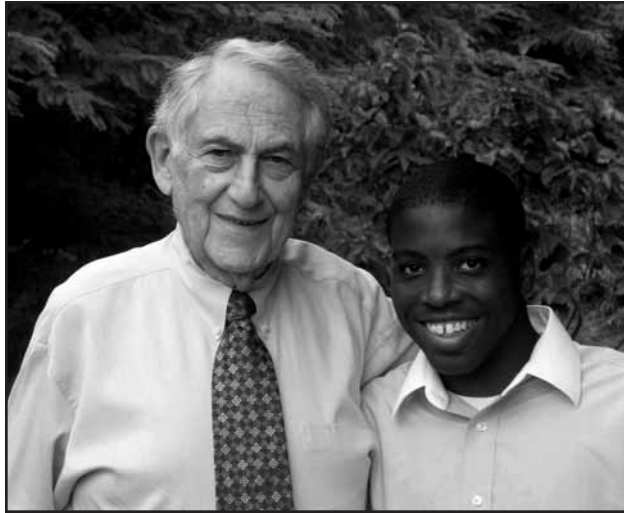
Advocates here and elsewhere say they see progress in better focus and skills and calmer children.

"If children are trying to learn to read and their eyes aren't functioning the way they need to function, it's just going to make that learning process more difficult," Flynn says. "It's not that kids couldn't get by without it, but why should they have to?"

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“Being the best I can be, involves helping others”

-- Mel Mallin



Cecil Keyes with his mentor, Mel Mallin

Mel Mallin, property developer, is best known for saving and restoring derelict buildings in the River Market area. But this generous 84-year-old former World War II B-17 navigator's modesty prevents him from calling attention to his philanthropy. When Mallin first heard about Gordon Parks Elementary School, he thought it was a daunting project. He asked Dorothy Curry, the school's co-founder, if there was some way he could help.

"She told me about Cecil Keyes, a third grader, who could use some tutoring help because he was way behind his grade level in reading," Mel recalled. "So my dog and I met Cecil. The little guy not only had trouble reading, he had trouble climbing stairs since one leg was four inches shorter than the other. I soon realized Cecil needed more help than I could give, so I hired a former 5th grade teacher to tutor him."

Cecil needed extra help because he was in and out of school due to multiple orthopedic surgeries performed at Shriners Children's Hospital in St. Louis. He was often accompanied to the hospital by Della Keyes, his stepmother, whom he called "Mom."

"In spite of all those hospitalizations, Cecil was always smiling," marveled Mel, who supported him emotionally after the death of his stepmother and was among those who recommended him for Boys Hope, a family-like home that offers opportunities and education through college for boys in need.

No one could have been more proud than Mel when Cecil's essay earned him a scholarship to attend People to People's Global Youth Forum for students aged 13-18. In Denver this November, 250 students from around the globe will participate in the conference and explore international understanding, education, leadership and humanitarianism.

Cecil wrote in a letter applying to the Global Youth Forum, "It was my mom who told me I can do anything if I believe. Now that Mom has passed away, I have to keep believing. Sometimes I feel, 'why keep going?' But I know my mom raised a champ. I will not give up."

Mel Mallin certainly doesn't claim to be a reincarnated Professor Higgins, but he continues to teach Cecil in subtle ways. "Right now I'm trying to get him to eliminate that irritating 4-letter word 'like' (speech pathologists refer to it as a 'word filler') from his conversation," Mel laughed. "I tell him he owes me a dime every time he uses 'like' in an inappropriate manner (i.e. . . . Like, I'm going to Denver). He now owes me \$460 ... just kidding. But we're getting there."

(cont'd on pg. 9)

Summer Enrichment Program

Creative Ways To Prevent Burn-Out



Teachers are invited to submit proposals for summer grants to assist with travel or continuing education. Teachers may apply once every two years. This year the grants were awarded to:

Rachl Rada, special education teacher, participated in a day-long training session at Discovery Cove in Orlando, Florida, where she swam with dolphins and sharks and snorkeled through colorful reefs teeming with tropical fish.

"It's wonderful to see the magnitude of life under the water in a controlled environment," said Rachl, who holds scuba diving certification. "Many of our students will never have the opportunity to wade in the ocean or walk on a beach, so I want to share with them my experiences in this whole new underwater world."

Traveling to Ireland was a dream come true for **Carolyn Faenger** whose maternal ancestors, the Morris', hailed from Galway.

Mel Mallin (Cont'd from pg. 8)

Does Cecil have plans after college? "He used to tell me he wanted to be a religious man," Mel replied. "Now he says he wants to be a chef. We laughed when I told him he could be a religious chef."

Cecil says Gordon Parks was a blessing for him. Not only did he learn a lot, but he also learned how to treat others. He loved his years at the charter school and he misses his teachers. Even though Cecil graduated from Gordon Parks and is now in the 8th grade at Christ the King parochial school, Mel Mallin's involvement with the school and with Cecil has not ended. "Don't thank me for my contributions," he says. "I've had a good ride."

The special education teacher's proposal, titled "Castles, Coastlines and Countrysides in the Emerald Isle," afforded her the opportunity to become acquainted with the Irish people, their customs, music and cuisine.

"Traveling abroad to the land of my ancestors gave me a better appreciation of the United States," she observed. Carolyn navigated the country's narrow roads in a rented car with help from traveling companion, Mary Harper, a Gordon Parks colleague.

Linda Williams'

grant took her and 20-year-old daughter Molly to a Health Spa at Chateau on the Lake in Branson, Missouri. "A weekend of pampering renewed my spirit," she said. "I came away refreshed and ready to take on summer school. The experience was a perfect antidote to relieving the stress of the school year. I've decided to save a little money each month, so I can continue to receive the relaxing therapies."

The first grade teacher also enjoyed attending the outdoor theater production "Shepherd of the Hills," an Ozark legend created by author Harold Bell Wright, which has been performed in Branson for 50 years.

Note: Pembroke Hill developed this grant program and shared its design with Gordon Parks.



Boys Hope helps motivated boys meet their full potential by providing a family-like home and an education through college. Eight boys live in the Boys Hope facility in southern Kansas City where they are provided with a private-college preparatory education and four years at Rockhurst University.

It Takes A Village To Raise A School



Ernst & Young volunteers organize a "Painting Party."

Ernst & Young

For young accountants at Ernst & Young, volunteering at Gordon Parks was an opportunity to share their analytical training with students. "Our tutoring program encourages kids in math," said Maggie Trambley, one of the firm's volunteers. "Math and Science, that's where the jobs are in the future. We employ the interactive Cyberchase/PBS Kids game which incorporates every day math problems, involving mazes, angles, shapes, saving money and budgeting."

This past summer, employees from Ernst & Young scheduled a "Painting Day" at Gordon Parks joining other volunteers in repainting classrooms. They also donated backpacks filled with school supplies for all 224 Gordon Parks students.

Want To Volunteer?
Call Pat Mallory,
volunteer coordinator (816) 753-6711

Kappa Kappa Gamma

Gordon Parks School is fortunate to receive assistance from corporate, educational and social organizations. In 2007, Kappa Kappa Gamma, a national social sorority, designated a portion of monies raised from its Holiday Homes Tour to Gordon Parks. In the spring of 2008, Kappa Kappa Gamma presented the school with a donation of more than \$17,000.

Bacchus Foundation

More computers and electronic smart boards* are coming to Gordon Parks, thanks to the fundraising efforts of the Bacchus Foundation. Since its founding in 1955, the philanthropic, social and service organization has introduced young adults into Kansas City's civic, cultural and educational communities.

Its primary objective is to conduct fundraising and provide volunteers for an annually selected beneficiary. For the 2008-09 year, the Bacchus Foundation selected Gordon Parks to be its fundraising beneficiary.

"We're also looking forward to volunteering at the school throughout the year," said John Teasdale, Bacchus board president.

** Smart Boards are large, touch-controlled whiteboards that work with a projector and computer. The projector throws the computer's desktop image into the interactive whiteboard, which acts as both a monitor and an input device. Users can write on the Smart Board in digital ink or use a finger to control computer applications by pointing, clicking and dragging, just as with a desktop mouse.*

Richard Moore Leads The Board

For Richard Moore, banker, farmer, pianist, singer and former educator, the timing was right to assume the presidency of the Gordon Parks Board of Directors. Moore, president of Commerce Bank Mortgage Corporation, is familiar with the dynamics of education having been an elementary teacher before careering in finance. He recognizes the potential of the public charter school as an educational beacon in the community.

Moore, a graduate of Southwest High School and the University of Kansas, taught school in Lawrence, Kansas, and in San Francisco (where he also co-founded an alternative school) before returning to the Midwest. He's been employed at Commerce for the past 22 years. As Gordon Parks enters its second decade serving students in the urban core, the charter school is most fortunate to have the expertise of a leader with experience in both education and finance.

At his home, Prairie Birthday Farm in rural Clay County, Moore takes off his banker suit and leads a life of gentleman farmer with sons David, 14, Christopher, 17, and wife Linda Hezel, a former professor of nursing at UMKC who has a doctorate in education. Linda manages the organic farm research station as well as harvesting and selling their produce to area restaurants.

One of Moore's greatest challenges is guiding the school to meet its mission. "We must manage our finances, understand the changing needs of our students and continue to be great stewards of this wonderful building. Our model is based on augmenting state funds. So we must be aggressive in raising funds in these times of slowing economy and budget cuts."



Richard Moore and his wife, Linda, on their farm.

Effective Classroom Testing

By: Dr. Lynne Beachner, Executive Director

With all the talk about children being *over tested*, why would we host a teacher workshop on "Formative Assessments?" Because successful urban schools emphasize common testing techniques -- those that aid the learning process but do not confuse students. In August, Connie Kamm, a consultant with 20 years experience in school reform, spent a day in "workshop" with our teachers dissecting the process of writing quality classroom tests.

Testing is tied to what we are trying to teach every day. It gives teachers a focus for their daily lesson planning. Pre-testing lets the teacher know how much work is needed and which students may need extra help. But the "aha!" moment for many in the workshop was the emphasis on the positive data that comes out of testing. "We often focus too much on what students get wrong on a test, and forget about celebrating how much they actually do know," remarked Carolyn Faenger, a special education teacher who now awards her students badges for their academic accomplishments.

The Mendon F. Schutt Foundation sponsored Ms. Kamm's workshop.



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