

ROOTS & Wings

Fall 2004

THE NEWSLETTER of ECHO HORIZON SCHOOL



Dave Rosenblum accepts the gavel from Fred Fern

Passing the Gavel: Fred Fern Tribute

How much has Fred Fern meant to Echo Horizon School? It's the kind of question that probably can't be answered, for his influence has marked us in both obvious and unexpected ways.

During his eighteen years of service as Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Fred oversaw many of the changes that have given the school both its identity and its sense of stability, while also offering calm and measured advice behind the scenes. So it was with equal sadness and appreciation that on June 8, at the end-of-the-year board meeting, past and present board members, as well as school administrators, celebrated Fred's legacy with a farewell dinner.

"It was," says Echo Horizon alumni parent David Rosenblum, who will take over from Fred as board chairman in September, "a nice and fitting tribute, and a lovely event. Fred's family was there, which gave them a terrific opportunity to hear what a contribution Fred has made over the years."

As with any commemoration, Fred's tribute dinner was filled with reflections on how far the school has come. "If you compare the school and the challenges it faced when Fred

became involved," Rosenblum notes, "and where EHS is today, the difference is startling. He presided over the board during the school's development from fledgling to fully-fledged and solvent."

In 1988, for instance, Echo Horizon had 153 students, and an annual operating budget of \$800,000, with a loss of \$80,000. This past year, we had 275 students, an annual budget of \$4,000,000, and a revenue surplus.

In other ways, too, Echo Horizon has grown and developed, from its expanded physical plant — a process Fred helped oversee — to the Echo Center program, which this year provided services to twenty students, a profound expression of the school's commitment to mainstreaming hearing impaired kids. This, of course, was one of the fundamental reasons that Echo Horizon was established, but Fred's particular genius was in recognizing that mainstreaming in and of itself was not enough. "It was more than mainstreaming," suggests Jim Harris, board president. "Mainstreaming in a sub-standard school doesn't make any sense. So from the beginning, Fred pushed for excellence in all aspects of the program."

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EHS Joins the Alliance

Echo Horizon's new affiliation with the Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs is helping to create a richer, more diverse school community.

This fall, two children enrolled in the school after being guided through the search and application process by the Alliance, which works with 39 independent schools throughout greater Los Angeles.

Founded in 1985, the Alliance seeks to educate minority families about independent schools, how they are governed and accredited, and how each one is unique.

"By the time the families get to our member schools, they are much more in sync and are probably asking the questions they need to ask, such as questions about school philosophy," says Manasa Tangalin, the executive director of the Alliance. The group also works to find good matches between families and schools, Ms. Tangalin said, adding that she is delighted with Echo Horizon's participation. The school's central location in Culver City, she said, makes it a good option for families living in a variety of neighborhoods.

The Alliance also offers a variety of support programs to families after they are enrolled in schools, such as conferences on topics affecting minority students and opportunities to network with other families. Some workshops are also open to any family enrolled in the member schools.

Jenny Boone, the assistant principal at Echo Horizon, said the need to join the Alliance became apparent after the school's strategic planning committee set increasing diversity as one of the school's long-range goals.

Organizations like the Alliance are needed to help independent schools fulfill their mission of becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, says Myra McGovern, a spokeswoman for the National Association of Independent Schools, a Washington, D.C.-based membership group that represents over 1,200 schools across the country.

Choosing a school and working through the application process, she adds, can be particularly daunting for families who have never had experience with independent schools.

"I do think these programs have great success," Ms. McGovern says. "Not only do they connect the families with the schools, but they also offer a lot of support to the families."

Principal Matters

by Paula R. Dashiell

A concern many parents have is how to keep their children motivated. A common lament is that "all they want to do is play". This observation is worth a closer look.

Children love to learn. They are eager, curious and open. They learn through play. Our job as parents and educators is to nurture and protect that innate curiosity and stay out of their way as much as possible.

When children are engaged in play, they are intrinsically motivated. In true play they are in a state akin to that magical state many athletes describe as the "zone" where extraordinary performance is easy because the focus is no longer on performance; all energy and attention is given to the activity. That is what play is all about – an exploration with no fixed objective, no judgments, no right or wrong, no good or bad. That is where learning and creativity thrive.

In school we introduce children to new ideas, to concepts and skills that we, the adults in their lives, think they need to learn. This is how societies perpetuate themselves, and in fact, can be an efficient and productive process. As long as parents and educators keep prescribed learning interesting and the child is engaged, it can often feel and function much like play. Under such circumstances natural curiosity stays alive and can thrive.

Unfortunately, far too often another element enters the equation – judgment. When a child feels judged, he or she becomes concerned about performance. The energy and excitement that could

be focused on learning and on acquiring new skill is dissipated, tempered by doubts and insecurity. Am I good enough? Did I do it right? The source of motivation becomes more extrinsic. Will my teacher like this? Will my parents be proud of me?

Children do need feedback, and often that feedback may contain elements of judgment. But feedback can be provided in ways that are positive and that primarily provide information and keep the child engaged.

Mistakes can be treated as just as valuable to learning as the successes. Showing interest and encouraging a child to explain his or her thinking, even if "the answer" is wrong, maintains the connection with learning.

When engaged in play, the child is in charge and can make choices about what to do next. Allowing children some choice when learning prescribed

skills encourages a more playful approach. Deciding whether to make up a skit or to write a short summary for a book share is "more fun," and more likely to be completed in a playful way, than filling out a standard book report form. That is especially true when the child is confident that his or her effort will be well received.

Rather than lament a child's desire to "play all the time," we might do better to applaud it, and perhaps to spend more time engaged in play ourselves.

Paula Dashiell (B.S., Indiana University '68, M.A.T., Harvard University '72) has been the head at Echo Horizon School for 17 years.



ALUMNI CORNER

Allyson Murrow, '97, a sophomore at UC Berkeley, is Director of Philanthropy for her sorority, Delta Gamma, and majors in business. Last spring, she organized a sixteen-team undergraduate basketball tournament that raised more than \$3500 for Service for Sight, an organization that works with the blind. Allyson graduated from Marlborough School, where she was captain of the basketball team, and worked with Habitat for Humanity. Her interest in service and philanthropy was first fostered at Echo Horizon. "Echo Horizon definitely engrains it in you," she says. "As early as first grade, we were taught that there are people in the world less fortunate than ourselves. Because of that, community service has always been part of my life."

Johnny Palmer, '02, is an 8th grader at Orville Wright Middle Magnet School. He is in the high honors program getting As. He was one of 10 students from the LAX communities to receive a LAXceptional student award. Johnny, an Echo Center graduate, says "Echo Horizon was a really awesome school. I learned to speak better and to not be so shy. I had great teachers at Echo Horizon and now that I am at my new school, I am taking what I learned and getting As". After school, Johnny has volunteered as a "VIP buddy" in a special AYSO league for children with disabilities.

Eric Rosenblum, '99, a senior at Harvard-Westlake School, spent part of this past summer at Oxford University in England, where he studied architecture, and war in world history. After his return, he worked as a counselor at Camp Harmony in Malibu, a five-day sleepaway camp for homeless children. At Harvard-Westlake, Eric is on the debate team, and plays in both the orchestra and the jazz band. "Echo Horizon, he says, "did a good job of grounding me. It encouraged me to become well-rounded, but also to be aware of the world beyond myself."

Lauren Moger, '02, a freshman at Archer School, has a passion for dancing; she spent July at the Debbie Allen Dance Academy, working on tap, jazz, hip-hop, ballet, Flamenco, and other styles. During the academic year, she is part of a dance troupe at her school. Her favorite form of dance, she says, is tap because of its improvisational nature; "You don't need music," she explains, "because you can make the rhythms all by yourself." She also plays tennis at Archer, and plans to go out for the school team this year. "Basically," she says, "Echo Horizon taught me to be myself. There are so many opportunities to learn things, and I can go for whatever I want to try."

Rachel Reiner, '02, an 8th grader at Palms Middle School is on the school All-Star Basketball team, after being actively recruited by the school athletic department. The team took first place in a competition between all the west side middle schools, of which, Rachel, an Echo Center graduate, is very proud. She is an excellent art student and in the honors program at Palms. According to her mom, Helene, "her success and confidence would never have happened without the training, support and guidance she received at EHS. Her confidence and her love of learning came from there".

"We Have Two Gifts to Give Our Children... One is Roots, the Other, Wings."



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Echo Horizon School is to educate hearing and hearing-impaired children in an inclusive environment in which independence, self-reliance and mutual respect are valued and encouraged with a curriculum designed to be challenging and developmentally appropriate for each learner.

GOALS

- Students will develop the academic tools, social skills and moral integrity needed to be successful in the next phase of education.
- Students will integrate themselves successfully, making contributions to a diverse society, while maintaining individuality and respect for others.
- Students will generate a variety of solutions and approaches to situations requiring thoughtful and creative problem solving.
- Students will develop the skills and positive attitude for engaging in learning as a life-long process.

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Passing the Gavel:

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Fred managed to get a lot accomplished without seeming to push at all, like the proverbial iron fist in the velvet glove.

"He's a people person," says co-founder Carol Landsberg, "who was able to see the financial picture and the personal picture, and somehow understand how they relate. He could take factions, and build harmony by getting everyone to understand that they were all working towards a common goal."

Jim Harris agrees. "Fred's gift," he says, "is that he gave fierce and intelligent leadership, always assuring a financially sound approach in complete fidelity to the school's mission. He is a great listener, and he was always able to keep people on point by asking the right questions, questions that would lead us to do more."

During the last week of school, Fred received a special tribute when he walked the school at the suggestion of Paula Dashiell, Head of School, and visited every classroom, where he was introduced to the students whose educations he has influenced in so many ways. It was, he said, "so special" — a sentiment echoed by Mrs. Dashiell, who called her joy in having him see the kids fully integrated "a last gift to us."

As for Fred's own last gift, it is the example he's set, the way that, notes Carol Landsberg, he took the school to the next level, and insured its continuity. Or, as she said at the tribute dinner, "I am very grateful to Fred Fern for giving ECHO Foundation eighteen years of dedicated service and stellar leadership. Eighteen years is a long tenure under any circumstances, but the eighteen years that Fred has led our Board weren't just any old eighteen years. ... These eighteen years were the years when the enthusiasm and excitement of the pioneering phase waned and the real work began — the kind of work that makes or breaks an organization. ... These were the years when excellence became a habit. Thank you, Fred Fern."

3rd Grade Goes to Kansas

Children who grow up in Los Angeles—or any large city for that matter—sometimes have a difficult time understanding what it might be like living in a small town. But Echo Horizon's 3rd graders had a chance to do that recently when they participated in Communities Around the World, a Web-based project that allows students from different schools to interact with each other over the Internet.

After reading what students at R.L. Wright Elementary School in Sedgwick, Kansas, wrote about their school and their community, the students were able to "meet" them with the help of a high-tech camera called "i-Sight," similar to instant messaging.

The activity blends nicely with Echo Horizon's 3rd grade curriculum, which includes a study of Los Angeles and lessons on various local services.

"This gives them an opportunity to extend their understanding of community," says Elaine Wrenn, Echo Horizon's technology coordinator, who helped design the Communities project in 1998 after she was named one of the Apple computer company's "distinguished educators."

"At the time, there weren't a lot of opportunities for young children to interact over the Internet," says Ms. Wrenn, who uses the network

of other Apple distinguished educators around the world to enhance Echo Horizon's technology curriculum.

During the two-to-three week project, students at the various participating schools design Web



pages describing life at their school and the community they live in—such as the weather, what they do for fun, and the public services in their neighborhood.

Sometimes they also include art-work or pictures of themselves, which makes the Web pages more

accessible to students who might not yet be fluent readers.

Students then visit each other's pages and discuss what they learned about each other's schools and neighborhoods.

Naturally, for children living in Los Angeles, one of the more unbelievable aspects of life in Sedgwick—where Wright is the only elementary school in the local district—is the fact that there are only three restaurants in town.

R.L. Wright students asked their counterparts at Echo Horizon about earthquakes, while Echo Horizon students asked the students in Kansas about tornados.

"It was a good way to know about different lifestyles," EHS 3rd grader Kyle Pratt said about

(cont. on back cover)

Field Day

School-to-school competitiveness was set aside recently when Echo Horizon's 4th and 5th graders joined students in the same grades at two other Culver City independent schools for a field day at Kronenthal Park.

Instead of playing against teams from The Willows Community School and Turningpoint School, each team was made up of students from all three schools.

"The best part was getting to meet new people," said one 5th grader, as she briefly paused from playing a game of "pillow polo," a somewhat gentler version of field hockey.

Each team, led by a faculty member from one of the three schools, rotated through the events, which included kickball, "chaos soccer," "pillow polo", "Greek ball", "hit-pin-fist ball", and another innovative match-up called "castle under

siege." In this game, one team would throw balls, trying to knock down three structures carefully constructed out of hula-hoops, while goalies tried to protect their "castles" from the assault.

"Rebuild! Rebuild!" Lindsey Fox, a 4th grade teacher, called out to one of the goalies before stopping to reflect on the day. "This has been a great end-of-the year activity," she said, adding that even though the field day gave the students an opportunity to meet other children for the first time, she was "amazed at how many of them already knew each other."

By the time children enter the upper elementary grades, many are already involved in team sports outside of school. Experts say that children shouldn't be forced to be in competitive situations. "My approach has always been that youngsters be individually challenged or challenged with

their friends," says George Graham, the director of the Pedagogy of Physical Activity Laboratory at Pennsylvania State University. "Then instead of competing against each other, they are competing against a criterion or a standard so they can all have success and everybody can feel like a winner."

After enjoying lunch and popsicles, the grand finale was a game of Capture the Flag with over 200 participants! Several teachers commented on how amazed they were at the high quality of sportsmanship displayed by students from all three schools.

Julie Parrino, a physical education teacher at EHS and one of the event's organizers, said because of the success of the event, plans are already underway for the next annual field day in 2005.

Very Special Arts Festival

When Echo Horizon hearing impaired students first began to participate in The Very Special Arts Festival — an annual one day arts fair for special needs children — at the Los Angeles Music Center several years ago, arts coordinator Cathleen Wolff saw it as a way to further the mission of the school. “One of our goals,” she explains, “is to guide our children to be accepting, non-judgmental, and empathetic. We have a reputation for addressing students as individuals, with individual needs, and the Festival lets us take this to another level.”

Still, for all her enthusiasm, even Ms. Wolff could not have anticipated that the involvement of all our students, hearing and hearing impaired, would eventually

By addressing material through several different modalities, we encourage students to push their learning further, and see how things connect.

spearhead the development of an integrated curriculum directly for the Festival, with students participating in three-week units of study constructed around the Festival’s motifs.

In 2003, the fifth grade adapted its Lewis and Clark social studies unit, using elements of both dance and musical theatre to “research, explore, and creatively interpret excerpts from the Lewis & Clark expedition,” and this year, the first grade’s oceanography unit became a multidisciplinary set of activities geared to the Festival theme of “My California.” First, students visited the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in San Pedro; then, they traced maps of the California coast, and choreographed, through improvisation, “a movement piece ... suggesting sea animal migration,” inspired by both their experiences at the aquarium and other sources, including Leo Leoni’s book *Swimmy*, in which a fish discovers the diversity and depth of his ocean world. The unit was so successful that it is now accessible on the Music Center website, to show how schools can take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Festival, which occurs each year

during the first week of May.

For Ms. Wolff, all this represents a validation, an example of how Echo Horizon’s concept of integrated curriculum can be applied within the larger world. She also highlights what it offers our students, who are exposed to a community of special needs students with whom they might not otherwise interact. “At the Festival,” she explains, “our kids are exposed to a variety of special needs students, who are exceptionally visible. There are lots of assistive devices such as hearing aids, lots of wheelchairs, lots of crutches, lots of physical dis-

abilities. It can be disturbing, but we teach to it before we go there, to prepare everyone. You can’t recreate the value of that, the way it teaches us to be grateful for our own gifts, and encourages our understanding of the struggles others go through every day.”

Mostly, though, Ms. Wolff stresses the educational value of a program that encourages multidisciplinary learning, and an integrated approach. “For me,” she says, “that is the most important aspect, that we connect these themes to the curriculum, which lets us take things to a deeper level.

By addressing material through several different modalities, we encourage students to push their learning further, and see how things connect. We start with science, then shift into dance and music; we let them experiment and create. Lots of kids at the start don’t really relate to the information, but via movement, they begin to live it, and to understand.”

According to Lynda Jenner, Music Center producer of the Very Special Arts Festival “the work done at Echo Horizon School has inspired other teachers participating in the Festival to follow their lead and explore the festival theme in preparation for their performances and arts activities.”

3rd Grade Goes to Kansas

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the project. “People say there is diversity in people, but there’s also diversity in the schools themselves.”

Using the camera to allow the students to actually see and talk to each other was a new dimension this past year—and one that Ms. Wrenn plans to include again.

The project is also an example of the new ways that technology is being used in the classroom.

According to “Technology, Innovation and Educational Change,” a 2003 report from the International Society for Technology in Education, information and communication technologies provide “tools that enable us to connect with people and resources all over the world, to collaborate in the creation of knowledge, and to distribute and benefit from knowledge products.”

Rae Niles, the technology coordinator at R.L. Wright, said that for her students, “the opportunity to talk with kids clear in California was invaluable. What a great way to learn to build friendships and an appreciation of others.”

The students in both sites also discovered that they had quite a bit in common with each other, such as playing sports or watching television.

Olivia Uhley, a 3rd grader in Tracy Tremblay’s class, summed it up well when she spoke during the videoconference: “I learned that you guys aren’t that different from the people here.”

The Web pages designed by Echo Horizon’s students can be viewed online at www.echohorizon.org. Click on “student work” and choose projects from the 2003-04 school year.

Echo Horizon School

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