

ROOTS & Wings

Fall 2005

THE NEWSLETTER of ECHO HORIZON SCHOOL



Building on Success

*You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension -
You've just crossed over into... the Construction Zone.*

Library "Starr"

When Echo Horizon's renovated and expanded library opens next year, it will probably seem to most students as if something—or someone—is missing.

It might appear sad that the school's long-time librarian Starr Johnson won't be there to make use of the new workroom, or to decorate the extra display space with stuffed book characters or posters of story scenes.

But it's because Mrs. Johnson was an integral part of the planning process for the new library that it will have so much more to offer both students and teachers. "I suppose it's fitting that Starr is ending her time here as the library's current home is being boxed and moved," assistant principal Jenny Boone said at a luncheon honoring Mrs. Johnson held at the end of last school year. "But she won't just walk away, she's ensuring our library will be moved and ready for kids...again."

After almost 20 years as the school's librarian, Mrs. Johnson said she knew she was ready to slow down. "It's time. I'm 66," she said recently while looking over some book-themed fabric she picked out to make curtains for the

library's temporary "bungalow" location. But retirement is not likely to mean rest for the energetic Mrs. Johnson. Her library work will continue at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, where she and her husband Ralph—also a familiar face at Echo Horizon—maintain a unique children's library.

The seeds of Mrs. Johnson's career as a librarian were actually planted because of an illness she had during her junior year in high school that forced her to miss almost an entire school year. She spent so much time at her local library in Lenox—trying to catch up on her school work—that a staff member finally asked her if she'd like to work there. She spent four and a half years working in the Los Angeles County public library system, where she ran her first summer reading program for children. The first book she read to children was "Hubert's Hair-Raising Adventure," by Bill Peet, one of Mrs. Johnson's favorite authors.

In 1964, she took a cataloging position at the UCLA research library, and worked there until after she met Mr. Johnson, also a

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Media Festival - 2005

The California Student Media and Multimedia Festival is the longest running annual student media festival in the United States, receiving thousands of video and multimedia entries each year from schools all over California, and giving awards in a wide variety of categories. Echo Horizon faculty and students have actively participated in the festival since 1997, its thirty-first year. "I first heard about it at a California Computer Using Educators Conference," says Technology Coordinator Elaine Wrenn, who has spearheaded EHS's involvement from the beginning. "That was the first year we had Video Club, so we submitted the Video Yearbook, and it won." In 1998, the Video Yearbook was honored again — it's received an award every year it's been entered — as were two special education videos, one about the Very Special Arts Festival, and another, produced as part of the fifth grade science unit, about the cochlear implant and how it is used. "Ever since that first year," Ms. Wrenn explains, "I've distributed the call for submissions out to teachers, and they've responded in a big way." Since 1999, in fact, Echo Horizon has never won fewer than four



awards at the Media Festival, and in 2005, the school garnered seven, in categories ranging from Science to Technical Arts to Language Arts to Special Ed.

Of course, while EHS submits work to the festival from all areas of the curriculum, it is in the Special Ed category that its impact may be most profound. "Technology," Ms. Wrenn says, "is an extremely useful teaching tool, especially with Echo Center kids. It's a great motivator, and it really opens up the learning process, and allows them to take control." Echo Resource Teacher Carly Alsbach agrees, noting that technology helps students develop confidence, while inviting others to understand where they are coming from. "A major goal," she says, "is to encourage self-advocacy, and one of the best ways

(cont. on back cover)

Principal Matters

by Paula R. Dashiell

I love the aftermath of a fight—hot, sweaty kids, muted by their anger, often mortified that they have been sent to see me.

Well, to say I love fights is overstating it a bit. I certainly don't like to see children upset. What I do love, though, is the opportunity that a good fight presents.

Usually a fight that ends in my office is one that has a history—misunderstandings, competition, conflict, bullying. Once the kids have calmed down enough to share the reasons for their anger with words rather than fists, a doorway opens. Each child wants to be heard and to be understood and, in my experience, being understood is more important than being "right."

When kids are given a chance to be listened to, without interruption, a space for healing opens. Resolution is possible.

At Echo Horizon, each child has at least five minutes of "sit time"—a brief period to cool off apart from one another before I get involved. Sometimes I meet with each child separately, allowing the "story" to unfold. I seldom say much.

Mostly, I just listen and watch as the anger dissipates and the ability to consider other ways of handling the fury emerge. It always amazes me how often the "stories" are the same, but from strikingly different—and self-righteous—perspectives.

Other times, I bring the children into my office together. Each gets a turn to explain what hap-

pened, again with no interruptions. When one child is speaking, the rule is that the other must simply listen, just as I do. Then the other child gets a turn. I am always surprised at how little I need to say during these meetings. Usually, all I need to do is validate each child's reasons for being angry—and then remind him or her that there are more socially acceptable alternatives to deal with conflicts.



Occasionally, I encourage a child to talk about the emotional side of the story rather than focusing solely on the action.

Frequently, an almost magical transformation begins to unfold. Once the kids really listen to one another, a surge of compassion bursts forth, and they start trying to make bridges to reconnect. Typical comments: "I'm sorry. I was just so mad I didn't know what else to do." "I didn't know you felt that way. I won't do that again."

"Are you OK? I really didn't mean to hurt you."

One of the many beautiful things about children is that they do forgive—and forget—much more readily than adults. Sometimes they leave my office hand in hand, or at least shoulder to shoulder, already on to another topic. Other times they leave with a healthy distance between one another, but in a calm, respectful manner. Subsequent fights are rare.

This is hopeful, and inspiring. And it is why I love fights: The making up is pretty terrific.

"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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Library "Starr"

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librarian, and got married. "We're a team," she says. "We always have been."

After their daughter Shari was born, Mrs. Johnson stayed home for awhile. Her relationship with Echo Horizon began when her daughter entered 3rd grade. She volunteered in the library when it was still housed in a classroom.

And while at EHS, she oversaw a series of moves for the library—one aspect of the job she says she's glad to hand off to her successor, Claudette Brown. "The library we have today exists because of Starr," Mrs. Brown says. "Even on vacations, the library was on the forefront of her mind. She would return with books on Yosemite for the sixth graders, books on missions for the fourth graders."

Mrs. Johnson's "ability to match a book with a child" is what EHS parent and library volunteer Karen Leichenger appreciated most. "I remember having three or four kids standing in front of me. You are trying to address all of their needs at once," she said. "When questioned about their interests they would say something like 'dolphins and mysteries.' I would pass this information to Starr who would, without skipping a beat, give me either the call number or author of a book that would fit their interests. You could mention a bungled version of either the title of a book, the author, even the plot and Starr could name the book. She is the librarian version of a "Name that Tune" aficionado."

As Mrs. Johnson sat, surrounded by stacks of posters on the table and a few boxes on the floor, she said the hardest thing about library moves has always been weeding through the older selections and trying to decide what to give away. Just when she is ready to take something off the shelf, the students get interested in it again.

"The things we have to let go break my heart," she says. "But they go to good causes." Many of Echo Horizon's donations have gone to help create a children's library at the Para Los Ninos Charter School for English-language learners in downtown Los Angeles.

Mrs. Johnson is also likely to continue attending annual library conferences, where one of her favorite pastimes is waiting in line for autographed copies of books from popular children's authors. And she promises she won't be a stranger at Echo Horizon.



Ralph and Starr Johnson celebrate retirement.

ALUMNI CORNER

Sarah Dietz, '01, is entering the 11th grade this fall at Marlborough, where she has been deeply involved in the Model United Nations program and Amnesty International. This summer, she was involved in a three-week art and architecture study-trip to Venice, Italy with other high school students from California and New York.

Perry Factor, '99, is entering college at Rice University in Houston this fall, where he plans to major in psychology. A graduate of Harvard-Westlake, Perry worked on the school's newspaper, and plans to continue working at his college newspaper. Perry volunteers each summer in the EHS summer school program. What he remembers most about attending school at EHS, he says, were the "good friendships and great teachers."

Rebecca Hoffman, '02, will be a 10th grader at Archer School for Girls this fall, where she plays volleyball and enjoys participating in the "Survivor" club, an after-school organization based on the popular reality TV show. She also enjoys ceramics and learning the piano. Academically, Rebecca, a hearing-impaired student who was part of the Echo program usually devotes one day over the weekend to studying and doing homework. Rebecca volunteers at Echo Horizon's summer program.

Jonas Nordman, '02, has been active in sports, primarily soccer and baseball, at Windward School. His favorite subjects are English and History. He volunteered at EHS this summer in "Sports and Games" class and in "Day in L.A". Spending time at EHS during the summer, he said, helps him maintain a connection to the school. "It's fun going back to the old school," he said. "It was good to go there everyday and learn good things."

Grandparents and Special Friends: *A Special Day for Special People*

One day a year, Echo Horizon School is turned over to visitors who may not care for swinging on the monkey bars, always wait their turn when cookies are being handed out, and don't have to be reminded not to run in the hallways.

It's the day that grandparents are invited to share time, lunch, and even class projects with their grandchildren. And for those children who don't have grandparents—or don't have them nearby—special family friends get to enjoy the event.

"Because you are not responsible for the daily care-giving, you can often spoil your grandchildren with time," Head of School Paula Dashiell told some 350 guests filling the auditorium this year on Grandparents and Special Friends Day. "You have time to listen, you have time to watch them, and you have time to play with them." And on this day, the guests also become part of the learning experience.

In Scott Reardon's 3rd grade classroom, Jerry Dobson sat in a student chair while his grandson, John Collier, conducted an interview with him and then sketched his portrait. Mr. Dobson, who traveled with his wife Bridget for the event, said he's impressed with the environment in which his grandchildren, Rachel and John, attend school. "The grandkids seem to have a plethora of nice experiences," he said. "And they make good friends."

In kindergarten, where the atmosphere was of course lively and the noise level higher, grandparents and special friends participated in a more hands-on lesson, making spiders out of colorful pipe cleaners and a substance similar to modeling clay. The activity tied closely to what the children have been studying about the differences

between spiders and insects.

And in 1st grade, the guests were involved in a book-making project. "I'm just amazed at how self-reliant the kids are," said Max Palevsky, who joined his grandchildren, Penelope and Jimmy Moskowicz, in the auditorium for lunch.

Inviting grandparents and other family friends into school reinforces for children the importance of their educational experience, education experts say.

As part of the partnerships they build with families and the communities around them, schools are "increasingly, reaching out to include grandparents, senior citizens, and others in the community to sup-

port and celebrate students' activities, progress, and school programs," says Joyce Epstein, an education professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and an expert on family involvement. "It seems that everyone benefits—the students, the seniors, and the schools—when all members of the community, not only parents, are involved in children's lives and learning."

Sherri Sloane, one of the Echo Horizon parents who organizes the annual event, said it's one of her favorite gatherings. "It's one of the most fun events because it's sharing generation to generation," she said. "The grandparents love it and the special friends love it."

While some guests, like the Dobsons, traveled across the country to enjoy the special day, others just had to fight their way through the traffic between Palm Springs and Los Angeles. "I wasn't going to miss this," said Monty Hall, who is 1st grader Jack Kessler's grandfather. "It's fun. Anything that has to do with grandchildren is fun."

"...a special time: a time to listen, a time to watch, a time to play, a time to enjoy"

The Spring Event - Changes in Our Spring Fling

For the last twenty years, spring has meant the Echo Horizon fundraiser, which, in recent years, has grown extensive, with more than 300 people in attendance, at venues from downtown's Union Station to the Culver Studios. When the fundraiser first began in 1986, however, it was a less intricate affair. "The first few years," recalls Assistant Principal Jenny Boone, who came to EHS in 1985, "it was the Western Night of Fun, and we had it at school. There were gaming tables where you could win tickets and everyone wore western gear."

There's something delightfully informal about such an image, something low-key, homegrown. "I remember those nights," says Head of School Paula Dashiell, "with a great deal of fondness. Parents used to cook and donate food." In 1986, however, Echo Horizon only had about 100 students and as the school grew, so did the fundraiser, until it became an off-campus event.

For two years in a row, it took place at a bowling alley, before eventually evolving into more of a sit-down dinner, with a live auction and an emcee.

Ever since the first Western Night of Fun, the fundraiser has relied upon a silent auction as a key component of the night. By 2004, however, the silent auction had grown so large that it effectively dominated the event. "There were so many items," says Jenny Savitsky, who chaired the fundraiser committee for the last two years, "that a lot of things weren't bid on; people just couldn't get to them all." At the same time, the sheer volume of materials ruled out smaller venues, since everything had to be displayed. To rectify the problem, Savitsky got the idea of moving much of the silent auction online, while opening it up to the entire school community, whether or not they attended the event.

There are many reasons why this is important, both in a practical and a philosophical sense. On the one hand, Mrs. Dashiell explains, "Revenue from the fundraiser is now a significant part of our budget," which means the more successful the auction, the more everyone benefits. Equally to the point, though, is the idea of community, for which the fundraiser functions as a unifying event. "In the past," Savitsky says, "during the silent auction, people would be so busy looking at tables they wouldn't talk to each other, and that didn't happen this year." Instead, the fundraiser felt more like a good-will evening, a chance to converse and connect. "To me," Mrs. Dashiell says, "that's one of the most essential aspects of the event, the idea of our community coming together and celebrating. I think the school is at its best when all constituents feel part of the community."

Octavio Gomez: Eyewitness to History

For technology aide Daniel Gomez, California history is not something that exists at a distance; it's a subject close to home. Gomez's father, Octavio, after all, was a friend and contemporary of Cesar Chavez, whom he met in 1966 while on assignment as a television cameraman. "My father was a freelancer," Mr. Gomez says. "He worked for a lot of places, including Spanish language television channels like KMEX." Although the elder Gomez has now been retired for eight years, he continues to work on editing and cataloguing his footage and still images (he was also a photographer), much of which has been archived through PBS.

For Octavio Gomez, meeting Chavez was a life-altering experience, one that influenced both his politics and his work. "I can't really say he was too political until he got involved with Cesar Chavez," his son remembers. "After that, he strongly believed his work would make a difference in getting the farm worker's message across." In the wake of that first meeting, Mr. Gomez began to document the United Farm Workers' struggle to unionize the grape growing industry, filming the march on Sacramento, as well as Chavez's three hunger strikes. His efforts continued into the 1980s, when he filmed the Grapes of Wrath campaign, which protested the use of pesticides that compromised farm workers' health. His

engagement influenced the whole family, including his son, who, as a college student, worked on the petition drive to establish a Cesar Chavez Day throughout the state. "What amazes me most," the younger Gomez says of Chavez, "is his commitment to non-violence, and I want to help keep up his legacy."

At Echo Horizon, Daniel Gomez has found another way to do this — by using his father's images to spur conversations about Chavez's life. Beginning in 2004 with a third grade class, he began to tell students about events like the walk on Delano, the hunger strikes, and Chavez's involvement with Robert Kennedy, who helped put the farm



workers' struggle in a national spotlight. This past year, the program was expanded for grades three through six and moved to the library, and although it may be scaled back now to third and fourth grade, Mr. Gomez plans to do it again. "I think it's important," he explains, "because it lets students learn about a man who did good through self-sacrifice. He shows the power of brains, intelligence, and heart, of making change with other means than your fist." Or as Chavez himself once said: "Non-violence is not inaction. It is not discussion. It is not for the timid or weak. ... Non-violence is hard work."

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Media Festival - 2005

(cont. from cover)

to achieve this is to let students produce iMovies or electronic books that explain what it's like to have hearing loss, or how their FM units work, and then present these to their class."

In 2002, Ms. Alsbach worked with Echo Center kindergartners on a vocabulary building DVD called "We Can Dance," where students demonstrated different dance vocabulary terms such as "stretch" and "wiggle," which they then described aloud. "The idea," Alsbach says, "was to practice vocabulary and learn sentence structures. It's more fun than traditional sentence drills, and because the kids could see themselves, they wanted to practice and practice to get it right." The DVD won an award at the Media Festival, as did Ms. Alsbach's 2005 electronic book "Big Green Monster," created during last year's EHS summer program with three Echo Center students, all of whom were going into first grade. For this project, Alsbach took the children's book "Big Green Monster" and had each student recreate it, page by page, with computer-generated illustrations; then, the kids practiced reading the text and recorded it over their own art. "Something like this," she enthuses, "really pulls it all together, enabling students to work on patterning and beginning reading skills, while giving them the satisfaction of making a movie and a book."

As far as the future, Ms. Wrenn suggests that one of the most important aspects of the festival is the way it opens up horizons, exposing both teachers and students to unanticipated strategies. "It's great to see what everybody else is doing," she says. "I always come back jazzed and excited, with a lot of new ideas." For Carly Alsbach, it all comes back to self-advocacy, to the notion of Echo Center students speaking for themselves, and explaining their standing in the world. "Absolutely," she says, "I will continue to submit work to the festival. It's exciting for students to participate in these projects, and to be recognized for what they've done."

Echo Horizon School

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