

Bridges: connecting school and community



The Education Newsletter of the Woodbridge School District

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The arts flourish at Beecher Road School . . .

It's commonly held that *the arts* come from the soul of people. *The arts* let us see the heights to which mankind can ascend. Creative expression requires the brain to apply skills in tandem with more concrete brain activities like mathematics and language. For that reason it is a facilitator of knowledge building. At Beecher Road School (BRS), exemplary programs in the visual and performing arts are part of the educational experience of all children. While the academic subject areas are rigorously taught and learned each day, the arts have a renewed emphasis as part of a *21st Century Model of Education*. Woodbridge educators recently shed light on just a few examples of what goes on in *the arts*.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Gaeton Stella is quick to point out several programs and events that underscore the rich arts culture at a school that has a long history of encouraging creative expression. He notes the recent *sold out* dramatic production of *A Thousand Cranes*. It is the true and poignant story of Sadako Sasaki, a young victim of the Hiroshima atomic bomb disaster. She was only two years old when the bomb fell and seemed to be unharmed, but at twelve she was diagnosed with *radiation sickness*, an aftermath of the bomb's effects. With boundless optimism, she takes an old story to heart: if a sick person folds a thousand paper origami cranes the gods will grant her wish and make her well again. She begins to fold her thousand cranes so her wish may be granted. She never finished them all.



A Thousand Cranes

"Powerful literature comes alive," Stella said. This production has planted the seed for a school wide BRS Drama Club in which a mini-community of students, teachers and other adults work together on a common goal. "This subject matter is not often dramatized in elementary school productions, but the students and adults wanted to move forward with it to bring the message to all who saw it," he added.

Today children from all over the world fold paper cranes and lay them at the feet of a statue bearing Sadako Sasaki's name in Hiroshima. BRS students made hundreds of origami cranes and shipped them to Japan. On the statue is Sadako's wish: *This is our cry, this is our prayer, peace in the world.*

Recognize these artists?



The task for fourth grade students was to study the works of great artists as part of art history. After study, students were to paint near life-size portraits of the artists in the style that those artists used in their most famous works. Here are some amazing examples.

Think *Sunflowers* in a vase or *Starry Night*. Vincent Van Gogh's bold style is captured at the left in this portrait.

Think about the world's most famous painting of an ocean wave. *The Great Wave* by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai inspired the portrait at the immediate right. Look at that wavy hair!



Animals of unusual and vivid colors were the signature of Marc Chagall that inspired the portrait on the right above.

"It's the very rare elementary school music program that can hold its own with middle school and even high school competitors." Dr. Stella, Supt. of Schools

Beecher Road School has been acknowledged for having one of the best music programs in Connecticut. Says who? Says an independent panel of judges who recently came to BRS for the express purpose of evaluating the many music ensembles. Read all about it on page 2.



Music programs literally “bring home the gold”

In early June a group of independent out-of-state judges came to BRS to adjudicate the many music programs. It’s very rare for adjudicators to come to an elementary school but they made an exception because of the school’s outstanding reputation in music education. The purpose of adjudication is to give teachers and students concrete areas in which to improve and excel. Amity Middle School-Bethany came to BRS for adjudication as well.

The judges sit and take written notes and talk into microphones giving oral “notes” while the different groups’ performances are recorded. The adjudication process looks at criteria such as tone and intonation, technique, musicianship, overall effectiveness, soloists, movement, staging and choreography. An elaborate 100-point scale is applied to each of the areas yielding a total point score for each performance – much like athletic events.

The BRS music programs adjudicated included concert band, string orchestra, jazz ensemble, percussion ensemble, color guard and choral group.

After an exhausting day for the students, teachers and judges, the scores were posted and every one of the BRS programs qualified for a medal. There are four categories of medals based on points earned: bronze, silver, gold and platinum – for 95 or more points out of 100. The final tally shows:

- Concert band – silver
- String orchestra – gold
- Jazz band – gold
- Percussion ensemble – gold
- Color guard – gold
- Choral group – silver



Jazz ensemble earned one of several gold medals



Creativity meets technology in “garage band”

What happens when you take a class of sixth graders who are 11 and 12 years old and tell them they can be the next *Grammy Award* superstar? All they have to do is prepare their entire management plan, CD artwork, costumes, bio and advertising copy, concert details and record an original song. What happens? The combination of cognitive and creative skills explodes into an ambitious project ending with the *BRS Grammy Awards*.

Creativity meets technology. Math, art, language arts, music and computer skills work in concert with one another to produce some very interesting results. After designing a CD jewel box, writing your bio, developing advertising copy, securing a concert venue, settling on a ticket price and creating your onstage costume and choreography, the biggest challenge is writing an original composition that is musical in all aspects and gets the approval of the judges - your peers.



Have you ever heard of Apple’s *Garage Band*? (See illustration below.) It’s a computer program that allows one’s musical imagination to run wild while conforming to the conventions of formal music. A series of thousands of instrumental loops are part of the program and the user/composer applies these electronic segments one by one to build a unique and original composition.

Loops are anywhere from one to eight measures in length and they represent all aspects of the orchestra, rock band, world music, folk, jazz and everything else.

Start with a simple piano pattern; add percussion, bass, guitar and then something unusual like orchestral bells. Build your composition to a crescendo and then come out of it as you began – or not. It’s all up to the composer. The sixth graders held their Grammy Awards at the end of the year. Our next impresario, superstar and composer just might come from BRS.



Connection with Yale Center for British Art stirs imagination

Since 1983, BRS has had an educational connection with the Yale Center for British Art that taps into teacher and student creativity in unique ways. This year was no different. Students from grades three through six visited exhibits at Yale that tied in with their curriculum.

For example, fourth grade students study *The New World* and the early explorers who settled it. An exhibit at the British Art Center titled *The New World: England’s First View of America* featured the 16th century drawings and watercolors of English artist John White. White accompanied an expedition directed by Sir Walter Raleigh to settle the colony of *Virginia* in 1585. White’s task was to document what he saw and bring back paintings and drawings to Queen Elizabeth so she could see what *the new world* looked like. White sketched every detail of the colony: native people, native flora and fauna, tools, food, agriculture and much more. This was England’s first glimpse into life across the Atlantic in what turned out to be the colony of Roanoke.



John White, *Indian Man and Woman Eating*, ca. 1585

With John White as the model, BRS students did the same thing in and around their school. They documented everyday life for others who have never seen a 21st century American school, its people or things. They went to work creating *observational drawings* and *writings* based on their own BRS/Woodbridge community. The drawings, paintings and writings were displayed during *ArtsWeek*.





Preliminary budget accounting has good news

As we close the books on the 2007-2008 Board of Education operating budget, we find that we have a surplus in two major areas. Because of good fiscal management, budget oversight and aggressive cost-saving measures, we spent about \$75,000* less than budgeted in *health insurance benefits* and *salaries* during the fiscal year that ended June 30.

This surplus is the result of changes in personnel that affected these two accounts. The Board of Education, looking for cost-savings while not affecting the educational mission or programs, offered an *early retirement incentive* to employees. Enough of them took advantage of the incentive that resulted in salary savings and lower health insurance costs for their replacements.

Because of the close working relationship between the Town and School District, such budgeting transparency and mutual trust benefit the taxpayers.

* unofficial figures subject to state audit



Healthy employees save us money

After years of double-digit increases for employees' health insurance premiums, we were quoted a 5% increase for this school year. Reason: Premiums are based on the number of claims the insurance company has to pay for a group. In our case, the group is pretty healthy. That itself is good news – and it saves the Town money.

High oil prices affecting our town

Just like every one of you, our school and town budgets have been slammed by the highest oil prices in our country's history. As we look ahead to this school year, and the approved budget that supports it, we already know that our oil accounts will be inadequate to cover the actual costs as we face this national oil crisis.

The school district purchases two oil products in substantial quantities: diesel fuel for the school busses and heating oil for *Beecher Road School*. When we prepared our budget last fall, for review

by the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance, we knew oil prices were on the rise. We used the best data available at the time to make our decisions. As a result we included a 50% budget increase in diesel fuel and 28% in heating oil anticipating the rise in cost.

However, since last fall oil prices have out distanced our budgeted increases. At this writing, diesel fuel has increased 55% and heating oil has increased 61% since October - (see table below).

As you are doing with your own budgets, school and town officials are working together to address this issue.

As a frame of reference for what has happened to the price of oil products over the past two years, we offer the following table of retail prices.

Average Petroleum Product Prices in New England/Northeast/Connecticut

[Source: US Energy Information Administration]

Date	Gasoline/gal.	Diesel/gal.	Heating Oil/gal.
Oct. 2, 2006	\$ 2.396	\$ 2.519	\$ 2.44
July 7, 2007	2.986	2.930	2.55
Oct. 1, 2007	2.832	3.117	[10/7/07] 2.80
June 23, 2008	4.120	4.833	[source: State CT] 4.51

School maintenance and upgrades completed or underway

This is an accounting of the *BRS* building and grounds projects completed during this past school year and those in progress:

Flooring

Rugs were removed and tile was installed in the south corridors, rotunda, and ramp areas. A new flooring system was installed in the north gym. Asbestos abatement and installation of tile in the south assembly hall and four other rooms is underway now.

Soffit/Insulation Repairs

Repair work to the soffit* areas in the South building are nearly completed. Insulation buffers were installed between the existing exterior soffits and the interior air plenum areas along the perimeter of the south building.

* A small ceiling-like space, often out of doors, such as the underside of a roof overhang.

Cost-saving lighting projects

The Town and School District collaborated on an energy saving lighting project. The Town supplied the labor; the

school district purchased the materials. The first project involved replacing old electrical ballasts and fixtures throughout the school with new energy efficient products. The new lighting ballasts enable us to reduce our electricity consumption and allow us to receive a rebate from *United Illuminating* resulting in a one-year payback on our investment. In the second project, the existing lighting poles and globes in the north parking lot were reworked. Many of the globes were damaged. The lamps were not working due to water infiltration and damage caused by rodents and pests. Globes were replaced and rewiring completed so that all of the parking lot fixtures are now in working order.

Painting

The north parking lot had a fresh coat of paint put on all of the markings last August. Painting in two hallways took place during the winter recess.

Grounds

Swing sets in the playground areas had

new borders and wood chips installed prior to the start of school last fall. More recently an area adjacent to the north parking lot was cleared of brush and undergrowth and filled with wood chips.

More work planned

- develop new *BRS Botanical Gardens* by planting flora indigenous to Connecticut in the area cleared of brush and undergrowth adjacent to the north parking lot; plan calls for labeling plants with English and Latin names
- clear additional brush and undergrowth
- paint parts of building
- upgrade nature trail
- build track to serve school and community
- continue process of requesting major upgrades to *BRS* with Town building committee
- apply for Connecticut STEAP (*Small Town Economic Assistance Program*) grant to reorganize traffic circle in north parking lot



Teachers work on professional improvement this summer

School curriculums never stay the same. As the world changes, so do they. Sometimes programs need minor adjustments and other times they need major overhauls. Local educators, at the direction of the Woodbridge Board of Education, do the work of curriculum revision. State guidelines and standards are developed in Hartford based on the best instructional practices and research in particular areas of study. These structures assist the process.

This summer five subject areas will be revised: *health education, social studies, Spanish, language arts* and *science*. When school reopens in the fall, BRS students and teachers will have a fresh start with the new curriculums upon approval by the Board of Education.

Besides curriculum alterations, 14 BRS teachers are attending Columbia University's *Reader's Workshop Institute* in New York. Based on research in the field, this intense training is designed to update educators with the latest *best practices* in reading instruction. Many other teachers are hard at work in university classrooms working on advanced degrees as required by Connecticut certification regulations. Still others are teaching in our summer programs and sharing their knowledge and skills in enrichment and academic areas.



What makes a "teacher of the year"?

Like most Connecticut towns, and for that matter most towns in the country, Woodbridge participates in the national *Teacher of the Year* program. Teachers who exemplify excellence in teaching and are recognized by their peers for their exceptional professional and personal qualities can be nominated for the distinction. The Woodbridge Teacher of the Year for this past school year, 2007-08, was Maureen Krawec. The Teacher of the Year for this coming school year, 2008-09, is Debbie Sokol.

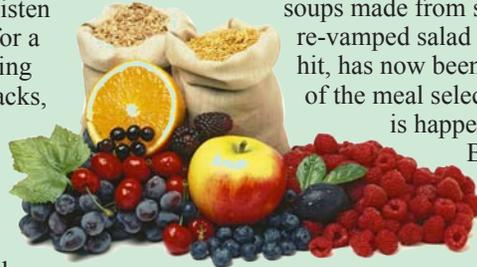
Maureen Krawec teaches second grade and has been in the school system for 14 years. Her peers say of her that she works diligently to help all children reach their full potential, and is always open to new ideas and willing to learn more about them. They also say she is intelligent, hard working and enthusiastic, is incredibly perceptive about her students' needs, and is loved by colleagues, students and

Focus on wellness pays off

Healthy snacks, homemade soups, a salad bar and Yoga all find their way into BRS. As a result of the work of the school *Wellness Committee*, healthier food and lifestyle choices are being made.

Eating snacks is a common part of an elementary school child's day. It's a time to get to know friends, listen to a story, or just relax for a few minutes before getting back to work. Those snacks, however, can be laden with ingredients that work against wellness and fitness. Today, parents who pack the snack have been advised to make healthier choices for their children. And they are. Fruit and veggies have replaced *Twinkies* and cookies in many cases. And parents have been particularly creative when sending in snacks for birthdays and celebrations.

The school cafeteria has had some major



changes already and can look forward to more in the fall. As part of the *Wellness Committee*, parent volunteers conducted taste-testing samples in the spring and piloted a salad bar. After tasting new healthy food sample options, students and teachers filled out surveys about the products. The results yielded two new menu choices starting this fall, including

soups made from scratch. The re-vamped salad bar, also a big hit, has now been added as one of the meal selections. All this is happening while

BRS continues to meet the requirements of Connecticut's

Healthy Food Certification program that distributes grant dollars.

In addition to snacks and food choices, *Family Yoga* was instituted this past year through a state *Primary Mental Health* grant. Nearly 50 families participated in the program.

parents. That's just some of what makes a *Teacher of the Year*.

Debbie Sokol is a speech and language pathologist who has been in the school district for 13 years. What makes Ms. Sokol a *Teacher of the Year* can be gleaned from her peers who say she is widely respected for her personal and professional integrity, assumes a leadership role in many capacities, is a life-long learner as evidenced by her pursuing a doctorate degree while teaching classes in her field at S.C.S.U., and, "Debbie is always giving to the Beecher community, especially to those with the greatest needs."

Sixth grade teacher went to China

Nancy White, sixth grade teacher at BRS, went to China during the spring recess as a follow-up to Dr. Stella's trip last fall to establish a sister-school in China. Her visit to Beecher's sister school in Shandong Province provided teacher-to-teacher contact about methodology, similarities and differences in the two educational systems. On her return, Ms. White shared her experiences with all BRS students and teachers and shared her reflections with the Board of Education. The partnership between the two schools will continue to grow as the new school year unfolds.

Board of Education offices moving

The Town needs more office space at the *Center School Community Building*. The First Selectman has requested that the School District Office, now in the Center, relocate to *Beecher Road School*. The Board of Education has approved the move.



As a result, the Superintendent's Office will occupy what is currently the Recreation Department Office in the south end of BRS. The district's Business Office will be located in the area now used by the Special Education Department also in the south end of BRS. The Recreation Department Office will be provided office space with a separate entrance on site in the south wing of BRS. The move will take place this summer.



21st Century skills we never dreamed of in school...

James Crawford and Nancy White, two teachers at BRS, recently earned statewide recognition from the *Connecticut Educators' Computer Association (CECA)* for their *Digital Storytelling* project used in the sixth grade. The award carries a \$1,500 grant for the teachers and school.

What is digital storytelling? It's defined as, "combining the art of telling stories with some mixture of digital (computer) graphics, text, recorded audio narration, video and music to present information on a specific topic." Think of it as making a movie. There are different types of digital stories, such as personal narratives, historical themes and events, and works of fiction. A documentary format that focuses on the theme, *Share Your Story*, was chosen.

This project integrates elements of language arts, social studies and digital



media to express the students' thoughts and ideas on various topics. Along with traditional writing skills, the teams of five students learn to use multiple pieces of software to create and edit digital photographs, audio and video to use in their movies. Students evaluate their movies as they would their writing. They look at ideas, organization, voice, word and picture choice, fluency and conventions. Valuable team-building and shared decision-making skills come out of this project as well as the *Share Your Story Film Festival* presented to parents, students and staff.



Summer programs keep BRS humming every day

There was a time when school buildings were vacant during the summer except for custodians and maintenance personnel, and a couple of administrators in summer attire. That's not the case anymore. *Beecher Road School* is a year-round facility that hums with a variety of programs for children and adults all summer – while the cleaning and maintenance goes on around them.

An extensive *Summer Enrichment Program* runs for five weeks, through July 25, with over 75 weeklong course offerings for children from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The enrichment classes are open to residents and non-residents alike and have a cost ranging from \$100 a class to \$250 depending on the selection.

Just for a sample, beginning courses like *So You're Coming To Kindergarten* and *Learn to Draw* to more intense classes like *Advanced Digital Photography*, *Filmmaking*, *Writer's Workshop* and *Mathematics* appeal to a wide variety of interests. Classes run the gamut in the arts, academics, hobbies, sports and health.

Clay Is The Way is a perennial favorite and is offered every week with both beginning and advanced classes for the would-be potter and sculptor. Children can improve existing skills or begin music exploration in classes such as *Slide Guitar*, *African Drumming*, *Drumline*, *Guitar Camp*, *Beginning Strings* and more. For

the outdoor enthusiast *Dirt Up Your Nails* might be just the introduction to gardening while *Birds, Bats and Butterflies* teaches children about the benefits of backyard wildlife and how to feed and create homes for nature's flying wonders.

For the sports and fitness-inclined there are *Foundations of Basketball*, *Basketball Fundamentals and Rules*, *Cheerleading*, *World of Dance*, *Soccer*, *Golf*, and what is described as "a week of physical and mental fitness," *Balancing Mind and Body*. For the nutrition-minded, there's *Healthy Cooking*.

The Town of Woodbridge Recreation Department uses the *Beecher Road School* facility for many of its programs including those for adults and children. *Summer Camp*, *Swim Lessons* and *Recreational Swimming* are just a few.

A special *Reading Clinic* is offered at BRS this summer. Children who need bolstering of those all-important reading skills will get a boost in comprehension, decoding, vocabulary and critical thinking.

Special education students have skills reinforced in the *Special Education Summer Camp*. The continuing year round *Extended Day* program at BRS provides parents with a safe environment for their children while they are at work. Children from kindergarten to sixth grade may play with friends in both structured and unstructured activities.



BRS celebrates "artsweek1"

In a school with a rich culture that promotes the arts, it's not surprising that *Beecher Road School* celebrated with a revival of a weeklong festival devoted to performing, visual and fine arts called *artsweek1* during the week of June 2.

Students and teachers were encouraged to wear different colors each day to demonstrate knowledge of the color wheel. Monday – black or white. Tuesday – primary color. Wednesday – secondary color. Thursday – complementary color. Friday - the color spectrum.

Musically, a concert by an outside group called the *Dudley Farm String Band* provided students and teachers with a taste of bluegrass, while Desiree Bassett gave a one woman rock concert. A duet for violin and viola was presented by a former BRS student and friend, both now in college. BRS hosted *Adjudication Day* (see article on pg. 2) as a panel of out-of-state judges evaluated the school's music programs.

Sixth grade Spanish language students presented a *Picasso Parade* while the BRS Band marched in the *Bethany Fireman's Parade* taking first place for a musical group in that event.

Another highlight of *artsweek1* was Thursday night's art opening and exhibition. With the school dressed to the nines with hundreds of pieces of student artwork, parents and friends came to view the exhibit and try their hands at painting, sculpture and weaving in the art studios.

Exhibits included: *Abstract Painting*, *Tropical Birds*, *Chinese Screens*, *Earth Dance Prints*, *Master Artists*, *Fashion Design*, *Political Cartoons*, *French Illustrations* and more.



To help defray *artsweek* costs and plan for next year, the PTO has magnificent museum quality note cards of student artwork, such as the Native American woman above, in many designs that have been professionally printed in full color. They are for sale at *Scoop This*, *The Red Barn*, *BRSPTO.org*, and at *Tuesday night Concerts on the Green - PTO Table*.

Board of Education embraces technology for meetings

Have you ever noticed how much paper is required to conduct public meetings? Heavy portfolios with sometimes hundreds of pages can bog down meetings for participants and observers.

The Woodbridge Board of Education will soon be moving to what's called the *E-Meeting*, as in electronic, where all or almost all information will be viewed electronically on portable laptop computers. When official actions are taken, the results can be posted immediately on the district web site for public access. Through a comprehensive search engine, one can virtually look up any topic from past meetings as well.

Not only are the *E-Meetings* more efficient, but they save money by eliminating the printing of tens of thousands of documents needed by the Board of Education each year. Saving a tree or two? That's not bad either. 🌳

We want your feedback. Email us: bridges@woodbridge.k12.ct.us

Visit often – Linger long

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

We encourage you to visit the Woodbridge School District revised web site. It contains thousands of pieces of information about the district. Bridges, the print publication you are holding, contains abbreviated highlights about many topics that are explained more fully on the web site. Keep informed about your school district and the people and programs that make it work.

www.woodbridge.k12.ct.us

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*The Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools gratefully acknowledge the dozens of staff members who made contributions to **Bridges**, and to all the staff who make programs and children's minds come alive every day. Thank you.*

The Woodbridge Board of Education holds regular monthly meetings in the Beecher Road School library media center. Go to the district website. Click the link to "Board of Education" > meetings.

The Woodbridge Board of Education, as a matter of policy, does not knowingly condone discrimination in employment, assignment, program or service, on the basis of race, gender, color, religion, natural origin, age, sexual orientation, disability or unrelated abilities to perform the duties of the position.

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