

Four Rivers Currents

January 2008

LAUNCHING SENIOR EXPEDITIONS

While you are hunkered down wherever you hunker, protecting against the cold, hibernating, our seniors are out in the world as perhaps they never have been before. They are in the midst of their Senior Expeditions, a culmination of their Four Rivers education and an embodiment of our highest aspirations for them. Here is a brief introduction; watch for opportunities in the spring to hear and see the results of these projects.

A successful Senior Expedition is a graduation requirement, but more importantly, it is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their highest level of learning at Four Rivers. It is about learning through interests and building skills as an independent learner, skills students will need often as they move into the world of adulthood. With guidance from teachers and mentors, they will show their ability to solve problems, do research, be persistent, organize time and resources, communicate well, and reflect on their efforts. Senior Expedition is a time-intensive, demanding project requiring a level of commitment beyond that of any other academic endeavor attempted at Four Rivers.

Students must complete the following basic requirements: Choose a topic that interests them. Develop guiding questions around it. Learn all about the topic and become an *expert* on it. Do something with the knowledge gained. And give a presentation to the community on what they have learned, how they learned it and what they did with their knowledge. In all aspects of this expedition, they are to demonstrate what we for years have been describing as high quality work.

Here is a list of some, but not all, of the topics our seniors will be pursuing this year: glass-blowing, graphic design/silkscreen, computers, pre-natal care, toxicology, literary editing/publishing, narrative art, mental health of children, house music production, traditional cooking, quality of health care, teacher preparation programs, mental health, guitar retrofitting and design, firefighting, environmental awareness, green building design, farm machinery design, sports medicine, genealogy, concert production, and film-making.

These projects really are impressive. They show our students at their best. So go back to your hot chocolates and warming fires. Just know that our seniors are out there stretching, striving, and learning. ~~ Peter Garbus

From the Executive Director's Desk...

How many of you watched the Patriots win their 16th straight game? Amazing as the whole performance was, what struck me most as an educator was the Patriots' decision to repeat, at a crucial moment late in the game, a pass play that had just failed. Tom Brady threw a 60-yard pass again to Randy Moss, who this time snagged it perfectly for a touchdown. That decision speaks volumes about what Four Rivers hopes for in its students: character virtues like perseverance and courage, and the importance of revision. Even those super-athletics did not get it right the first time, and they were not afraid to try again. It's a good example to keep in mind as students approach the mid-point of the year.

It's the admissions season again, and we need your help. Our records show clearly that word-of-mouth is the most powerful way that applying families have been drawn to Four Rivers. If you see the opportunity, spread the word of our Admissions Information Sessions on these dates:

Saturday, January 12, 10-11:30 am Wednesday, January 23, 7-8:30 pm

Saturday, February 2, 10-11:30 am Wednesday, February 13, 7-8:30 pm

Applications for the 2008-09 school year are available from Leslie Taylor in the School Office or from our website, www.fourriverscharter.org. The application deadline is February 26, 2008. Four Rivers families who are considering enrolling a sibling in our school, please remember that you must put in an application by the regular Feb. 26 deadline, too. We will have openings for a full 7th grade, and typically have a few openings for 8th, 9th, and 10th, but none for 11th or 12th.

A reminder that Student-Led Conferences for Trimester 2 will take place in the afternoons of January 23 and 24, after a 12:30 dismissal. Please call Ms. Taylor for an appointment. Also, all parents are invited to a Family Council sponsored parenting workshop on January 16th, at 7:00, in the Common Room on the topic of **"Teen Dating and Healthy Relationships"**.

~~ Ed Blatchford



Breakfast with Rube Goldberg! Read all about it on page 3.

"This institution is an equal opportunity provider. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20254"

Four Rivers Charter Public School
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301



Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.

7th Grade News



With all of the snow before the winter break, the seventh graders just needed to go outside and play! They had been working hard on their first literature circles in English, the properties of similarity in Math class, and a big *Postcards from the Past* project in English and Science class. Stop by the 7th grade hall way this winter to read some exciting short science fiction adventures written on beautifully designed postcards. Each card incorporates scientific facts about a geological time period into a post card format sending news home to "Present Day base."



SNAPSHOTS

HIGH FASHION en ESPANOL!



Morgan Leonard (left) in boxing gloves and a stunning sombrero and John Zarcone (right), sporting a lovely medley of stripes, pose during the Spanish III fashion show



Below, the Spanish II class poses with their "co-workers" at the Springfield Republican, where they went to do fieldwork. See story on page 5.

SPANISH II GOES TO SPRINGFIELD FOR FIELDWORK



ANNOUNCEMENTS

NURSE'S NOTES

With all their education, I am finding that students lack knowledge about safety when it involves over-the-counter medications. Some examples:

1. **Accepting a pill from a classmate, even if it is not in the original container.** I recently had a student request something for a headache. I was unable to help because the student had taken a round pill they thought was Tylenol, taken from a clear unmarked baggie. Not only could the medication not be verified, the dosage was unknown
2. **Believing that Motrin, Advil and Ibuprofen are all the same.** Tylenol, aspirin and ibuprofen are all different and therefore act differently

I will continue to educate students on an individual basis. Please review the following basic safety issues with your child:

- Alcohol and tobacco are drugs
- Over-the-counter drugs DO have side effects and can be overdosed.
- Under-dosing (less than recommended by manufacturer) is ineffectual. Please read all instructions.
- At school, take only those medications administered by the nurse. If your child requires over-the-counter medication during hours the nurse is not available, please have his/her physician complete the school's medication order form. If I can be of assistance, email me at:

jmilton@fourriverscharter.org

MID-TRIMESTER CONFERENCES

Student-led mid-term conferences are on **Wednesday & Thursday, January 23-24** after an early dismissal at 12:30

To reserve a conference time with your students advisor, please call Ms. Taylor in the office at 775-4577

GRADUATION CEREMONY

Sat, June 7 at 4:00 pm

Four Rivers Charter Public School will graduate its first class. Mark the date!

ADMISSION APPLICATIONS

FOR SIBLINGS

OF CURRENT STUDENTS

While siblings of current students are given priority in the admissions lottery, each sibling must still submit an application for admission by the **deadline of February 26th**.

Call or stop by the school office for an application.

** FAMILY COUNCIL ANNOUNCES A SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR PARENTS **

Wednesday, January 16, 2008, 7:00-8:30 pm. Strong Oak, a Community Health Educator with NELCWIT, will speak on the topic of "Teen Dating and Healthy Relationships"

ATTENTION!

I am Kendra Grader, currently a senior at Four Rivers. I am in search of original literature ~ poems, essays, short stories. As part of my Senior Expedition I plan to create the first literary magazine at the school.

Submissions may be given to Kendra Grader or Ms. Durkee at school OR emailed to Kendra Grader: kgrader@fourriverscharter.org

*Siblings, family members, and friends are all welcome, along with students, to enter their work. Submit as many pieces as you like. **Deadline: February 28, 2008***

If you have any questions, please feel free to email Kendra Grader at the above address

8th Grade News

MATH

In December we completed an investigation entitled "Tessellations: Artful Math or Mathematical Art?" First, students designed and created their own unique tessellations, which are currently on display in the eighth grade wing. They combined color theory with precision in drawing to craft a basic design element that was then tessellated, or copied repeatedly, to form a larger piece of art with surprising and intriguing new patterns. Next, we used these pieces to find and identify various forms of symmetry, like reflections and rotations. Finally, students explored how symmetries can be described and created using specific, mathematical instructions. At the start of the new year we'll be launching into a new math investigation that focuses on patterns, functions and algebra.

SCIENCE

With two days to go before the holiday break, students in eighth grade science were climbing on tables, rigging pendulums to the ceiling, setting up dominoes, sending marbles down ramps, and tenuously balancing soda bottles loaded up with pancake batter. And that's what they were supposed to be doing! The smell of warm grease permeated the room. The mood was festive yet focused, since there wasn't much time and the reward for this challenge was sweet (though it would have been sweeter if someone had remembered the syrup). The challenge was presented as Improv Rube Goldberg: to design an elaborate contraption to complete a relatively simple task — cooking a pancake. In teams of three, students had to design and build a particular segment of the contraption. They had to coordinate with the adjacent teams to figure out how to transfer the energy of a rolling marble, for instance, through the next piece of the contraption — a chain reaction, of sorts. In the end, a couple of greasy pancakes were eaten by a few brave souls. We gained a new appreciation for the work of chain reaction artists like Peter Fischli and David Weiss, whose film of a 100-foot reaction called "The Way Things Go" had helped set the tone for our own contraption-building work. In addition to continuing to build our skills in teamwork and engineering, the purpose of this work was to launch our current investigation into Energy. We'll look at how energy is perceived by both science and society, where energy comes from and what forms it can take, how energy is used, and what it means to build sustainable communities with our current energy resources. Look for more details on this investigation and related projects next month.



HIGH SCHOOL NEWS

DIV II MATH (Ms. Howard)

In ninth grade math this month, we studied probability and the expected value of games in the IMP unit "The Game of Pig". In this investigation we explored different strategies of playing and winning games, as well as how to simulate situations to study their probabilities. At the end of December each student, either individually or with a partner, created his/her own game. This project required each game to have clear directions, suggest strategies, and discuss how probability was a component. Ninth graders first tested the games on each other, and, after some final tweaks, shared their creations with the 7th grade.

The tenth grade math students began an IMP Unit called "Cookies" during the month of December. In this exploration, students were asked to analyze the costs and limitations on a cookie-making business. Through graphs of linear inequalities, which represented these limitations (called constraints), students are able to determine the best decisions that the owner should make to earn the biggest profit. As this study of inequalities finishes up, we'll begin to study a



9th graders and their middle school colleagues play the games designed by 9th graders in Math class.

ENGLISH (Ms. Makuch)

In 11th grade English, we are continuing our study of dystopia (*an imaginary place where life is extremely bad because of deprivation, oppression or terror*). Students are writing political activist poetry inspired by the novel *1984*, and then engaging in literature circles with texts they have selected. We will be following this with the Pulitzer-Prize winning text *Blindness* by Jose Saramago. Students will be analyzing these anti-utopias, as well as studying intentional communities, to determine what qualities they value in society and creating their own visions of utopia.

In 12th grade, English and Social Studies will be partnering up to continue our discussion of Social Commentary through the lens of the democratic movement in China. We will be looking at different examples of social commentary as they appear in modern media, and examining the methods by which satirists ply their craft. The class will be reading selections from *Wild Swans* as well as *The Tiananmen Papers* to gain an understanding of modern Chinese history. They will use this knowledge to write a play that teaches this history and offers social commentary on our

HIGH SCHOOL NEWS

DIV. III MATH (Mr. Levine)

When a student asks "Is this going to be on the test...?", the real question is often "Do I need to bother learning this?" Four Rivers math tries to trump this question by making math interesting, so that many students get caught up in the problems and actually *want* to learn the material. The IMP math program accomplishes this by creating complicated problem scenarios that literally take months to solve. Along the way, students pick up a wide array of math skills. The problems focus on problem-solving and communication, skills that students will need far beyond high school, regardless of the challenges they encounter. In IMP-3 we just completed a geometry unit based on the growth of trees in a circular orchard, and in IMP-4 we are studying the physics of falling objects to put the final touches on a problem about Ferris wheels and trigonometry. In Consumer Math we are studying credit and debt, and linking those topics to percents, compound interest, and related math topics.

SPANISH (Mr. McDonnell)

Spanish II

The Spanish II class has been very busy. The class wrapped up a vocabulary unit on the media, including television, newspapers and the internet. During one investigation, students traveled to the offices of *The Republican Newspapers* in Springfield, MA to interview two editors of Spanish language newspapers (*El Pueblo Latino* and *El Sol Latino*). They also met with the host of *Salu2 Nueva Inglaterra*, a Spanish talk show affiliated with Telemundo, Hartford/Springfield. The bilingual interviews provided the class with a unique look at the lives of three influential Latinos working in Pioneer Valley. (see photos last page) Students are currently exploring the tradition of the piñata and recently had the opportunity to construct their own.

Spanish III

The Spanish III class finally released photos from their fashion show that ended the first trimester. Students are now reviewing both formal and informal commands, as well as the conditional tense. They just finished reading the short story "El eclipse" and wrote short paragraphs describing an imaginary encounter with the Mayans.

Spanish IV

The Spanish IV class has been reviewing the past perfect and pluperfect tenses and discussing vocabulary associated with vacations and travel. Most recently the students have been presenting learning scenarios in our own version of "Whose Line is it Anyway." The class will soon be reading "estampas" or memoirs from Puerto Rico.

U.S. History (Mr. Wallace)

The ninth grade is currently engaging in debates on the issues involved in creating the Constitution. Students will then take part in a role play that simulates the debates over ratification of the Constitution. Ultimately, they will complete a project linked to contemporary constitutional issues and the Bill of Rights.

In tenth grade, students finished a range of great projects related to environmental issues and developing a "Sense of Place." Students created digital stories about Cape Cod and Warwick, MA. Three students put on a performance of *The Lorax* for the seventh grade. Other students wrote and performed original songs about what makes Greenfield unique, while yet others created intricate models of proposed towns that represented an emphasis on smart growth and sustainability. Now we are beginning our unit on the American Revolution and the Constitution.