



MANTUA PTA NEWS

www.mantuapta.org

March 2004

Carole Thomas President's Message

Please in My Back Yard!

First a quick reminder...because spring break is scheduled for the first week of April, the next PTA meeting will be on Wednesday, April 14th at 7:00 in the school library. I encourage everyone to attend this meeting to learn from your school's administrators, teachers and PTA members what is happening at your child's school. In keeping with the PTA's goal of making the PTA meetings not only an opportunity to conduct our business, but also an opportunity to educate and inform parents about school and child issues, Jim Scutt, the PTA president from Frost, will provide an overview regarding the transition to middle school and how parents can be active at the middle school level.

"Please in My Back Yard" is the message of the article written by Dave Lenox, our representative on the FCCPTA's sponsored Special Education group. Mantua Elementary School is home to a diverse student population of over 900 general education, deaf, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), gifted, and learning disabled students (profile and program statistics can be found at <http://www.fcps.edu/DEA/schoolprof/elementary/MantuaES.html>). The school encompasses three connected school programs: Total Communication Center for the Deaf, The Gifted and Talented Center, and a Base School. The diversity of Mantua Elementary School provides our children with many opportunities to exercise awareness, appreciation, understanding and empathy for the diverse needs and strengths of their peers, paving the way to successfully "get along in the real world". Dave's message of how everyone benefits when we encourage diversity in our "Back Yard" is evident everyday at Mantua.

Each day, one can witness "miracles" that occur at our school, such as a bilingual kindergartener reassuringly translating a teacher's instructions to a child who has just arrived to our country, students learning that sports can be just as fun with teammates of varying abilities, and that playing with and supporting each other during a game in our Mantua Basketball League makes for memories and friendships they will keep for a lifetime, fourth graders (one hearing and one deaf) whose ability to communicate with each other has grown with each year of friendship performing together in the school Talent Show, teammates cheering for their physically challenged peers at Field Day, Kids Care Club members organizing holiday baskets for needy families and realizing that they received as much from the experience as the families did, classmates instinctively and non-judgmentally stepping in to lend a hand or instruct a peer, and many more.

Please promote your child's awareness and appreciation of diversity. By having access to new people, cultures and experiences, we can all learn. **Help make it happen right here, in my back yard.**

From NIMBY to PIMBY Why we need to EMBRACE Special Education Programs in our Mantua Community

By Dave Lenox

In a recent global survey of public opinion that asked the question, "Where should children with intellectual disabilities attend school?" 65% of respondents from the US answered, "In Special Schools". The other options were, in regular schools but special classes – or in regular schools with inclusive classes. Only 25% of Americans wanted to have Special Education students in classes with their children. Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) is alive and well it seems when it comes to segregation of our children with Special Needs.

I am currently serving as the Special Education Representative on the Mantua ES PTA Board. In this role, it will be my job to provide information and support to parents and staff members as they deal with the Special Education process. The days of the Special Ed room being isolated, pitied and ostracized ended with the disco era. And while some retro fashion styles may come back, that mind set concerning our children must never come back. I am a parent of a child receiving Special Education services, a former Special Education Teacher, and a former Special Education student. Now I am the Vice President of Sports and Competition and Athlete Leadership Development for Special Olympics International. It seems I tend to get a little wrapped up in this stuff.

We have already started an email discussion group for sharing information related to Special Education.

continued on page 3

Jan-Marie Fernandez, Cheryl Thompson, and Tina Tingler **Notes From the Mantua Principals' Office**

Playground Safety Has spring finally arrived? The first week of March was full of sunshine, just right for all of us to shed those winter blues and get out of the house. This is the time of the year when playgrounds and outdoor play can provide your child with hours of fun, fresh air, and exercise. (We could all use a little of that!) Unfortunately playgrounds can pose safety hazards that we should be aware of. Consider these statistics:

- In the United States a child is injured on a playground every 2 1/2 minutes.
- More than 200,000 children each year are treated in emergency departments for playground-related injuries.
- More than 75% of playground injuries occur on a public playground.
- Most playground injuries involve falls, and over half of the time the child's head and face is hurt.
- Most of these injuries are preventable with proper supervision and safer playground equipment and design.

(U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission)

So the question becomes: "What can you do as a parent to provide a safe and entertaining place for your children to play?" The following are a few commonsense suggestions offered by the CPSC:

- 1) Make sure that surfaces around playground equipment are adequate and have wood chips, mulch, sand, pea-gravel, or safety mats for cushioning.
- 2) Check for dangerous hardware, like open "S" hooks or protruding bolt ends as well sharp points or edges in equipment.
- 3) Make sure spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- 4) Make sure that elevated surfaces, like platforms and ramps, have guardrails to prevent falls.
- 5) Carefully supervise children on playgrounds to make sure they are safe.

In addition to supervision and safe playground equipment, it is necessary to teach your children about how to play safely, understand the rules of the playground, and act responsibly. Most playgrounds have some type of climbing equipment, swings, seesaws and slides, all of which have specific safety rules that should be followed. At Mantua students are taught the playground rules at the beginning of each year and are reinforced as necessary. The Physical Education Department has worked with the K-2 families to specifically teach our students how to drop from the Monkey Bars and how to land safely when jumping from platforms. Playground schedules have been arranged so that children playing together are age appropriate.

Research has found that playgrounds are essential to not only physical strength, but mental strength. Playgrounds help develop social, emotional and cognitive skills and provide our children with lots of fun. Let's ensure our children's safety by following the **SAFE** guidelines: **S**upervision, **A**ge Appropriate Equipment, **F**all surfacing, **E**quipment Maintenance. Utilizing age-appropriate equipment, following a regular maintenance schedule, limiting equipment height and maintaining adequate surfacing, combined with adult supervision, can greatly reduce the incidence and severity of playground injuries.

Counselor's Corner

In March, the K-3 students will be focusing on Conflict Resolution. They will review what we have been learning about feelings and "I messages." We will use the "conflict resolution bridge" to practice problem-solving and agreeing on solutions. The new step will be to try and understand the other person's point of view and feelings. The fourth grade will be having lessons on Learning Styles; fifth grade will be discussing cliques and what to do about them; and sixth grade will focus on the process of decision-making.

We would like to thank and congratulate all the students who made posters for the Safe and Drug Free Bookmark contest. Special congratulations go to our two first place winners, whose posters were delivered to the Safe and Drug Free Youth office for the countywide competition. They are: Isabel Greenburg (5th grade) for the 4-6 grade category; and Ariella Richmond (3rd grade) for the K-3 category. Also honored locally at Mantua are: (in the 4-6 category) 2nd place, Lucy Shi (4th grade), 3rd place, Shannon Hees (5th grade), Honorable Mention, Christine Lee (4th grade) and Kasha Nielsen (4th grade); in the K-3 category, 2nd place, Kateri Crist (3rd grade), 3rd place, Brynne Townley (3rd grade), Honorable Mention, Hannah Fritzingler (1st grade) and Nate Oliver (3rd grade). Thanks for helping to keep our world a little more safe and drug free!

Why we need to EMBRACE Special Education Programs in our Mantua Community

continued from page 1

Just send your email address to davidllenox@aol.com or DLenox@cox.net if you want in – we even let parents in who do not have children receiving special education services. I will be on call in case of questions about the Special Education programs and processes. You will also be able to access a library of support materials to help you or your child deal with unique challenges they or their friends may be dealing with. In short, this is an effort to make us all more comfortable in a truly inclusive school community.

I would like to believe that our school and community is different from the survey group noted above. We have already seen the benefits of a TC program that has taught our children that deafness is not a roadblock to friendship. I have spoken often in international settings about our school's "sign of the day" policy, and how my children are eager to see if they get to have TC students in their class. They tell us, "It just makes the class more fun."

Our children with special needs have special abilities to teach us. They have wisdom that we seldom tap, and will never tap if we keep them out of our schools and classrooms. I once heard a presentation from an Ethicist who was also blind. She noted that people with disabilities make the world a more human place to live. If we never had to teach ourselves to communicate on a personal level with people who learn slower or differently, people who use sign language or communication boards, people who struggle in areas where we excel, then we will never learn the fullness of thinking independently. Our children learn about how to be a part of the REAL world, when they learn how to make themselves understood by someone who has trouble communicating or learning. Learning the art of truly listening to ALL people leads to enlightenment. Neither will occur without vital and inclusive Special Education programs in our schools.

A friend of mine who has mental retardation, Erin Holloway, wrote: "In my vision, children in schools would all come together to learn. Children would teach each other that being different is being yourself, and that it is acceptable to be your own unique self." I'm ready for my children to hear that wisdom. But they can only really learn it from the source; so I am now a PIMBY person: PLEASE In My Back Yard! And in my school, and my community and in my life, because I have so much yet to learn.



Our annual Spring Carnival this year allowed participants to traverse the universe on a "Galaxy Quest" that was again a great success! Intergalactic travelers enjoyed Shooting the Stars basketball, Space Jams Karaoke, Rings of Saturn hula-hoops and much more. Lucky voyagers returned from their quest of the galaxy with a mountain bike, a portable DVD player, \$500 cash and other prizes. This year for the first time we were fortunate to have a second Moon Bounce generously donated by **Judy Dain** of Long & Foster for our travelers to enjoy.

A most sincere thanks goes to carnival co-chairs Pam Promisel and Laura Mead. Thanks also to Mary Townley, Chris Purcell, Sabrina Pagkalinawan, Beth Whitehead, Nathan Merrells, Nancy Robinson, Cindy Dengler, David and Sherry Braun, Jane Love, Sheri Bulger, Candy Xenos, Jennifer Cooper, Priti Jain, Lisa Pafe, Pam Pavord, Elena Albamonte, Miriam Smolen, Barb Suidikas, Kris Abel-Helwig, Pete and Loren Brandman, and to the many parent volunteers.

A special thanks goes to our local realtors who donated our sensational raffle prizes: **Judy Wonus**, who donated our cash grand prize (along with a matching direct donation to the PTA), **Carolyn Wilson** of Long & Foster, **Mary Thyfault Clark** of Weichert Realty, **Bill Rakow** of RE/MAX Xecutex, **Adele Aiken** and **Gayle Yates** of RE/MAX Allegiance, as well as **Sarah Harrington** and **Anne Harrington** of Long & Foster. And to the Washington Redskins who donated an autographed Patrick Ramsey jersey. Thanks to all for making this year's carnival a success!



Camp out in a museum, dance, laugh, act in a play, discover new cultures and make new friends. Sound like fun? In Girl Scouts, girls learn and play together through our informal educational framework that includes participation from caring adults. One of those adults could be YOU! No Experience needed - Just Enthusiasm. Volunteer opportunities available today in Mantua. We will train! Call Barb Hinton 703-385-0682 or email chevalmom@hotmail.com



The next principal's coffee will be held on Wednesday, March 24th starting at 9:30 am at the home of Barb Suidikas. The topic is SOLs and other standardized testing. Please join Jan-Marie Fernandez and others at Barb's home which is located at 3819 Acosta Road. For more information or directions, contact Barb at 703-385-0358 or Suidibarb@aol.com.



4th Annual Mantua Raccoon 5K & Mile Fun Run

Saturday, May 8 8am/830am

Benefiting Fairfax Inova Hospital Life with Cancer
In memory of Roberta Romano

With so many affected by cancer in our community, we know we are supporting a great cause, Life with Cancer. Their mission is to enhance the quality of life of those affected by cancer by providing information, education, and support. The Life with Cancer program provides on going support and is offered free of charge thanks to generous contributions from our community. Help us be a generous supporter by being a race sponsor. Donors of \$500 or more will be added to the back of our t shirt and all sponsors will be included on our brochures and advertisements, including our race banner. If you or your company would like to be a sponsor or you know of someone whom we might contact, please notify Jennifer Cooper, 703-426-2490 or jakoooper@aol.com or Joyce Montgomery, 703-323-5053.

WordMasters

A team of students representing Mantua School recently won highest honors in the WordMasters Challenge – a national language arts competition with over 240,000 students entered annually, which consists of three separate meets held at intervals during the school year.

Competing in the very difficult Gold Division of the Challenge, and supervised by Kristen Toth, the school's fifth graders places fourth in the nation in the year's first meet, held in December, among 295 school teams competing at this grade level and in the division.

Three of the school's students won highest honors for individual achievement as well: **Ryan Gehr** and **Elizabeth Kim** were among only 232 students in the entire country who earned perfect scores in the difficult Blue Division meet for this grade level, while sixth grader **Anna Stapleton** was one of only 41 students nationally to do the same at her grade level in the Gold Division.

Others at the school who also achieved outstanding results in either the Blue or Gold division of the meet included third graders **Will Mathews**, **Maisie Newman**, and **Paul Scott**; fourth graders **Betsy Ryan**, **Will Abbott**, **Naveen Gupta**, **Shannon Henris**, **Michael Schneider**, **Raychel Stovall**, **Ji-Hae Choi**, and **Andrew Kim**; fifth graders **Gordon Adam**, **Kelly Yoo**, **Maura Brennan**, **Lindsey Heigh**, **Daniel Kong**, **Hannah Konigsberg**, **Timothy Planert**, **Drew Prettyman**, **Jenny Tobat**, **Katy Williams**, **John McKeown**, **Hye-Bin Kim**, and **Ben Pickus**; and sixth graders **Sam Surette**, **Meghan Farrell**, **Jurle Han**, **Camille Loomis**, **Cassie Meeker**, **Katy Williamson**, **Brian Levine**, **Maryann Shamsie**, **Mansi Mehta**, and **Nick Xenos**.

Our family is so very thankful for the Kids Care Club Share to Care Talent Show held on February 7th with the proceeds dedicated to our 6-year-old son, Cameron, and his ongoing battle with a rare form of leukemia. We are also so grateful for the blood drive in January and the ongoing individual offers of support and love that we receive regularly from this amazing Mantua Elementary community. On February 5th, Cameron underwent a bone marrow transplant (with his 4-year-old brother Connor being the donor) that he is continuing to recover from at Johns Hopkins Hospital. We continue to pray that he will be able to fully recover from this cancer so that he can cherish the joys of childhood that we so recently took for granted. We are grateful to be in such a loving community that helps us take each step of this journey. If you would like to read more about Cameron's battle with leukemia, journals of his struggle are posted at www.supportcameron.com.

*Sincerely,
The McClain Family*

Did you know that the **Mantua Community Care Fund** is a special fund designed to address the emergency needs of Mantua Elementary School students and their families. The fund provides financial assistance and support to those in need, either through direct grants or by payment for needed services. All requests for assistance are strictly confidential. If you or someone you know is needs assistance, please contact PTA President Carole Thomas at Caroleandjay@aol.com or the Mantua School Office.