

# THE NEW BRITAIN EDUCATOR

A PUBLICATION OF NEW BRITAIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## In New Britain schools WE ARE FAMILY

A family consists of many parts, all of which play a vital role in its functioning. In New Britain schools, our family includes students, teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, custodians, guidance counselors, food-service workers, nurses, security guards, tutors, therapists, secretaries, coaches, media and computer systems specialists and social workers. According to Superintendent Dr. Doris Kurtz, the family has “a shared vision – to promote and sustain a culture and a safe and secure learning environment” (see Commentary, Page 2). Throughout this edition of *The New Britain Educator*, read all about it: We are family.

The New Britain family, clockwise from bottom left: Vance teacher Amy MacInnis helps Jackson DeJesus; Chamberlain food service worker Sirlei Castrogiovanni serves a meal; Chamberlain food service worker Madeline Cruz; Nancy Tenkin leads an adult education class; guidance counselor Judi Bartlewski; New Britain High math teacher Keith Pigeon; Sharon Lapila, receptionist at New Britain High School; Jefferson principal Meg Walsh, right, runs ideas past Carol Amenta, center, and Nancy Bailey.

### We are also champions!



New Britain High basketball players celebrate their state championship: from left, Kristen Cummings, Sharnise Beal, Julia Fagan and Mary Siv. Page 12.

### It's elementary: Northend building for future

New construction blends old, new

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Named after New Britain's first superintendent, Charles Northend, who served from 1873 to 1880, Northend Elementary School has a rich history.

Bridging its century-old past with current technology and advances, the school is near complete with its building renovation project. The long-awaited upgrade will feature a new computer lab, new art room and four new classrooms, including two kindergarten classrooms.

“We're so excited about moving into a brand new, renovated school,” said Northend Principal Elsa Saavedra-Rodriguez.

The year-long project has created an addition of 8,500 square feet, designed by Kaestle Boos Associates and coordinated by TBI Construction. The renovated school will

See NORTHEM Page 10



A view of the newly renovated Northend Elementary School.

PHOTO: REBA SALDANHA



# School system's thinking: We are family



**Dr. Doris J. Kurtz**

For the past two years, the district has been engaged in learning and applying Systems Thinking. We began by educating the administrators, then a sampling of teachers, and most recently students with Cognitive Connections. Eventually, the entire district will learn and apply systems thinking. What is systems thinking?

Systems thinking is a set of elements that function as a whole to achieve a common purpose. Senge and Lannon-Kim define systems

thinking this way: "Systems thinking is a discipline for interrelationships in more effective and efficient ways."

The interconnectedness and interdependence in systems thinking makes me think of a family. One definition of "family" is an association of people who share common beliefs or attributes. So, a family is a system. The Consolidated School District of New Britain is a family. Students, parents, faculty, staff, administration, and Board of Education — we are a

family.

We rely on our combined focus, energies, efforts, values, goals, and resources to achieve our shared vision: to promote and sustain a culture and a safe and secure learning environment that builds capacity in administrators, faculty, and parents to improve academic achievement, equipping all students with the necessary aspirations, skills, and knowledge to successfully complete college, be lifelong learners and productive

citizens.

This edition of The Educator has as its primary focus our family — the dedicated, talented staff who love and care for our children, the parents who contribute so much to our district, and the students who make us proud every day, all year long. We are family. *Familia, rodzina* — in any language family means love, unity, and support.

*Dr. Doris J. Kurtz is superintendent of New Britain Public Schools.*

## Working together to make our city better



**Mayor Timothy T. Stewart**

Despite its size, New Britain is a community that functions as a family working together to make our city a better place in which to live.

One area in which we have worked extensively is our efforts to provide outstanding educational opportunities for all students, from our gifted and talented programs to the special education programs for students with

special needs.

The promise to upgrade all of our city's schools has been kept, culminating in the final work being completed on Northend School.

New initiatives designed to deal with overcrowding at New Britain High School, Connecticut's largest high school, will provide expanded physical facilities as well as expanded curriculum

offerings.

In addition, plans are underway for opening an Alternative Behavior Center designed to move problem students to a new environment that should offer them the kind of guidance, counseling and tutoring that they require while providing mainstream students a more stable learning environment.

All things considered, New Britain

does an excellent job of providing for the educational needs of our students. I remain committed to working with the Board of Education and the Superintendent to assure all New Britain residents that our children will receive the best education we can provide.

*Timothy T. Stewart is mayor of New Britain.*

### NEW BRITAIN EDUCATOR A PUBLICATION OF NEW BRITAIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Frances B. Wolski**

## Your children are our children, too

It is a privilege to serve on the Board of Education in the city in which you were born, raised and educated, and then to do so with your own children. There is a strong bond between the two and it certainly becomes the foundation of an extended family.

Adults within all of our schools become role models, surrogate parents, friends and confidantes to our students.

They encourage, counsel, and teach. They provide a comfort zone to those students who need an extra word of encouragement to get them through a trying situation.

We learn, enjoy, cry, laugh, and eat with them. We hear their music and share their successes. We take pride in their accomplishments and commiserate when things go poorly. We love them

like our own because, in fact, they are.

Each and every staff member, student, and board member is part of this extended family and is proud to be a member of that family known as the Consolidated School District of New Britain.

*Frances B. Wolski is President of the New Britain Board of Education.*

## Committed to excellence

### New members bring expertise to board

BY CAITLIN BOWLER

Five new members were elected in November for four-year terms to the New Britain Board of Education, the body that provides oversight to a school district that serves more than 10,000 students.

The board meets on the first and third Monday of each month in meetings that are open to the public. Members serve on one or two of five committees — Finance, Facilities, Curriculum, Personnel, and Policy.

The five new members bring an array of life and professional experience, talents, and ideas to the board.

Sharon Beloin-Saavedra, a lifetime resident of New Britain, former legislative assistant in state government, and mother of three children who attend Lincoln Elementary School, is a first-time board member. She sought election after becoming increasingly active as a parent volunteer at her children's school and getting involved in district-wide issues. As the mother of

an autistic daughter being educated in the district, she brings a unique perspective to the board.

Paul Carver, also a lifetime resident of New Britain and employee at the Department of Public Utility Control, spent 10 years on the City Council before joining the Board of Education for the first time. With two children, including a son at the high school, he is committed to balancing his interests as a parent and taxpayer.

Marilyn Krackowsky, a former nurse and mother of six, has lived in New Britain for 53 years and is returning to the board for her third term, having served for eight years in the 1980s. Education has always been important to her family, and with children and grandchildren in private, parochial, and public schools in New Britain she has a perspective on different educational models.

Rev. Charles F. Tillett Jr., a minister at Spottswood AME Zion Church, is a first time board member with two children who attend public schools. He taught social studies for a year before becoming a minister, and has since served on various education committees in Connecticut and North Carolina. He views himself as an advocate for all children.

Clarence E. Woods, a manager at an employee



**New Britain Board of Education:** seated from left, Dr. Doris Kurtz; president Frances Wolski; Paul Carver; standing, Rev. Charles Tillett Jr., Sharon Beloin-Saavedra, vice president Peter Kochol, Marilyn Krackowsky and Clarence E. Woods.

recruitment firm and a 17-year resident of New Britain, is a first-time board member. He ran for the board after becoming deeply involved with the PTO at the DiLoretto Magnet School where his two daughters are enrolled. He is particularly interested in working to solve financial issues that the district faces.

# Speaking the same language

## Students receive skills to compete in global economy

BY GRETCHEN WEBER

When it comes to preparing students to succeed in the global economy, New Britain schools are all speaking the same language.

With a successful Spanish immersion program at three sites, traditional language classes in the other schools, and a comprehensive resource program across the district serving English Language Learners with diverse backgrounds from dozens of cultures, the New Britain public schools are giving students the skills to compete in a multicultural world.

"The writing is on the wall," said Adnelly Marichal, the district coordinator of bilingual education, ESOL (English for Speakers of Another Language) and world languages. "Everywhere you look, jobs in government and business are looking for people who speak more than one language. People in other countries are speaking many languages, and to survive in this global economy, our students need to have language skills, too."

The dual language program housed at Diloreto, Smalley, and Slade is one way that New Britain is enabling students to

become truly bilingual. The philosophy behind this immersion program is to provide a strong educational foundation based on language and literature in a multicultural setting.

Students are selected by a lottery in kindergarten; one half of the students in each class are native English speakers and that other half are native Spanish speakers. In the elementary grades, all classes are taught in English one week and in Spanish the next. At Slade, there is a 60-40 split; two classes are taught in Spanish and the rest are in English. The goal is for students to have mastery of both languages and to promote multicultural integration and understanding. Approximately 570 students at the three schools are enrolled in the program.

Non-immersion, traditional language classes in New Britain schools are part of the World Language Program, which was once named the Foreign Language Program.

"We don't call it 'foreign' anymore," said Marichal, "because the way our nation is today, many people are speaking these languages right here."

The World Language Program includes classes at the high-school level in Spanish, Italian, French, German, and Polish. In the fall, there will be classes offered in Mandarin Chinese at the high school and for first-, second-, and third-graders at the new La Pensée Académie. The Mandarin



Jefferson Elementary School Arabic language teacher Omar Nouchkioui sits with third-graders, from left, Mohamed El-Qatabi, Abdul Malek Saleh, Khalid El-Wisha, and Ahmed Saleh.

PHOTO: REBA SALDANHA

classes at all levels will be taught by two visiting teachers from China, who will be in New Britain as part of a partnership between the state of Connecticut and the government of China.

The Chinese teachers are part of a larger effort to implement Mandarin as a second language in districts across the state and to increase awareness about Chinese culture and history because today's students will need knowledge of China to function in the business and policy worlds of the future.

"We want to teach students the languages we're competing with in the global economy," said Superintendent Dr.

Doris Kurtz.

Another exciting addition to the language program is Omar Nouchkioui, New Britain's first bilingual Arabic teacher. Nouchkioui began teaching at the Jefferson School last year and has been helping close to 30 English Language Learners improve their language skills and become more integrated into mainstream classes. Some of the students, many of whom are newly arrived to the United States, have strong academic backgrounds, and some have had interrupted schooling, so the role of bilingual teachers like Nouchkioui is to fill in many of the gaps in the students' education.

## Educator's new curriculum calls for traveling, family time

BY CAITLIN BOWLER

After a distinguished 36-year career in Connecticut's public schools and universities that has included teaching, administration, curriculum and testing development, professional-development consulting and prolific writing, dedicated educator Dr.

Kristina Elias-Staron is leaving the profession this June to embark on what promises to be an equally busy retirement.

Elias-Staron

joined the New Britain schools in 2003 as curriculum director for the school system, a job that entails the continuous updating and rewriting of curricula across all subject areas, oversight of staff development on good instruction, and management of district need programs, including grant writing for federal, state, and competitive grants, and budgeting.

During her three-year tenure, she and a staff of eight curriculum coordinators worked tirelessly with the Board of Education and the assistant superintendent to successfully update the math, science, and social studies curricula for grades K-8, the language arts curricula for grades K-5, and the English literature curricula for grades 9-10.

"It's a large job," she said, and a challenging one. "This is an urban school system with a large population of teachers and kids. There's heterogeneity of everything. We're always making 12 plans."

But, she emphasized, it has also

been the most rewarding.

"This is my eighth job in Connecticut, so I know the state very well. This school system has more heart and more talent and a greater sense of commitment than any place I've been. This is, to me, the brightest group of people I've worked with and they're all so dedicated. The people have really made this experience what it's been."

Elias-Staron decided to become a teacher in order to give back to the community after a childhood spent "playing school" in Jersey City, N.J. Her family, originally from Lithuania, settled there in 1951 when she was four, after being transported from a displaced persons camp in Germany.

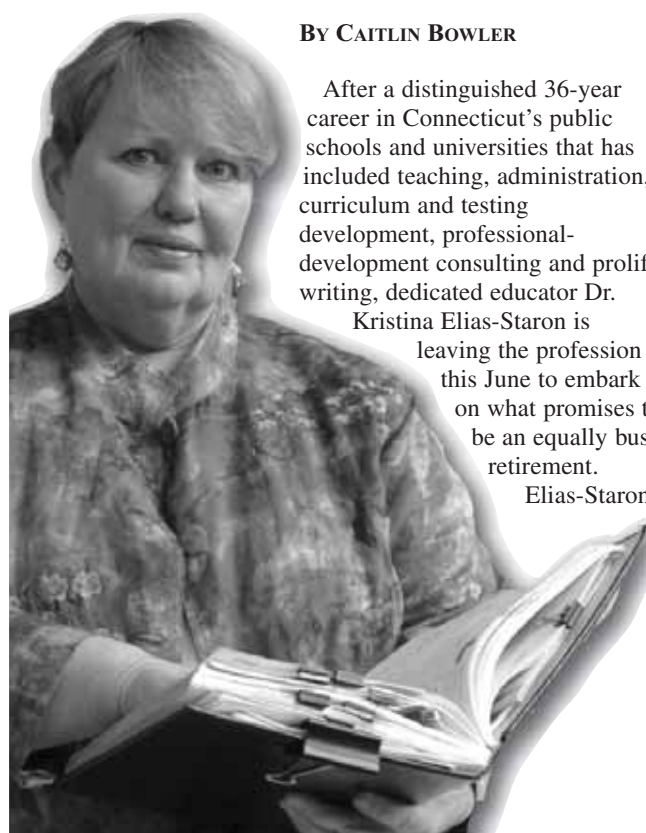
"As an immigrant I was taught by my parents to be grateful for everything we had. The notion of giving something back was instilled by my parents."

She attended Jersey City State College where she studied English and education, before moving to

Connecticut to assume an assistantship in the theater department at the University of Connecticut, where she earned her master's in theater history. She has lived and worked in the state ever since.

Elias-Staron will kick off her retirement with a vacation to Acadia National Park in July. In the fall she will travel with her daughter, who has yet to see the family's homeland, to Lithuania to visit cousins with whom she reconnected only six years ago, and walk the land her parents farmed. Back in the U.S. she will spend more time with her family, including five grandchildren, and plans to remain connected to her profession by doing educational consulting part-time.

"It was a delicious 36 years and I'm very grateful for the people I've met and the things I've been able to do," she said. "I would not trade a minute of it."





# Leaving legacies

## Ramseur retiring after 37 years in public education

BY CAITLIN BOWLER

After 11 years as principal of Roosevelt Middle School, and 26 more as a teacher and administrator, Connecticut native and highly-regarded educator Vaughn Ramseur is bowing out of a life in public education this December.

Roosevelt Middle School has thrived under Ramseur, who continually strives to create a culture for the students that values education and commitment to study.

“My goal at Roosevelt,” he said, “has been to develop a culture where education is seen as important and a key to what students wish to obtain in life.”

In 2001 the Connecticut Association of Schools recognized the work of him and his staff, naming Roosevelt the top middle school in Connecticut.

Always supportive of staff, Ramseur has constantly tried to create an environment that encourages them to innovate and develop professionally.

“I’ve always wanted to make sure staff have been able to try programs and strategies that they felt would work for their students,” said Ramseur.

“Teachers have been able to implement important programs they identified and that have ultimately helped our students.”

After graduating from

Weaver High School in Hartford, Ramseur knew he wanted to do work in communities and was considering a career in the YMCA when he first entered college. Once at college, he realized that he had not received all the information he should have when applying and decided that he wanted to get into education to help kids make good, informed decisions about life after high school, which included getting into careers that made sense for them.

He taught English and coached freshman football for six years at Weaver High School before becoming an administrator in Bloomfield.

Since coming to Roosevelt in 1995, Ramseur has worked hard to get parents to participate more in the life of the school. The community, he said, is very supportive of its students and it has been rewarding to see more parents joining committees and volunteering.

Most rewarding about his career in education, however, have been the students.

“There are kids that come back and let you know that sometime, someone in your school said something that helped them make good decisions about their futures. Positively changing the direction of lives is what this is about,” he said.

Ramseur is confident that programs in the New Britain schools, such as Superintendent Dr. Doris Kurtz’ Journey to College initiative, will continue to positively influence students at Roosevelt to make personal commitments to education.

“These programs,” he said, “have an important impact in our crusade to have students believe that they can achieve whatever they want through education.”

In his retirement Ramseur plans to remain busy, making improvements to the home he shares with his wife and dedicating more time to his hobby, antiquing. He earned a law degree in 1986 and would like to utilize that, possibly getting involved with family law.

## Chamberlain School’s Cicio exits to ‘next stage of my life’

BY AMANDA WEBER

When asked how many children she has, Sharon Cicio, retiring principal of the Chamberlain Elementary School, replied “652.”

“I have always considered all of the students my children,” she said.

Since her first year as principal in 1988, Cicio has put her heart and soul into creating a supportive and academically strong environment at the Chamberlain School.

In 1999, she implemented the Success for All reading model that has proved to be extremely successful. Since the first year of the program, the students have continuously made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a statewide accountability system mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, in reading and are continuing to improve annually. Chamberlain is the only school in New Britain that has used this program, and Cicio credits the success of the program to “the strong commitment of the teacher and parents.”

“We have a very supportive and dedicated staff. People tend to come here and stay here,” said Cicio. “They work extremely well together. They know our bottom line and focus: We have to be relentless when it comes to the success of our kids.”

This strength and commitment is the legacy that Cicio will leave behind when she moves on to what she refers to

as the “next stage in my life” in June. It will be a bittersweet end to her 18-year career as principal at Chamberlain, but Cicio says she is looking forward to it. “It is a natural life progression. Everybody says ‘you know when it is time.’ It’s time.”

Cicio may be moving on, but the imprint of her commitment, love and support for her school, students and staff will remain behind.

Cicio followed her dreams of becoming an elementary school teacher in Meriden, Conn., in 1970 after graduating from Southern Connecticut State University with a degree in education. Over the next several years, she worked full-time and went back to SCSU, teaching everything from first grade to special education while getting a master’s degree in education and her sixth-year degree in administration.

“I wanted to be able to have an impact on students outside of just my classroom,” she said.

Cicio lives in Wallingford with her husband, Philip, a retired carpenter. She has a son, a daughter, two grandchildren and a third on the way, all of whom she looks forward to spending more time with this summer.

PHOTO: REBA SALDANHA



# ROBOTS 101

## Robotics competition helps students be BEST they can be

By MEAGHAN CASEY

A team of budding engineers from New Britain High School is proving its accomplishments at a national level, competing among the best of the BEST.

BEST — Boosting Engineering, Science and Technology — is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire students to pursue careers in engineering, science, and technology through participation in a sports-like robotics competition.

Founded in 1993 with 14 competing schools and 221 students, BEST now has more than 700 middle and high schools and more than 8,000 students participating each fall.

Each school is provided kits of equipment and a set of rules, and is given six weeks to design, build and test a small radio-controlled robot that outperforms other robots. For this year's task, students were to design a robot capable of replacing the Hubble Space Telescope's aging batteries and gyroscopes — devices used for measuring or maintaining orientation.

The New Britain team, made up of pre-engineering and honors physics students, piloted the program in the New England area.

"It was our first year participating in the program, and the first of its kind in our area," said

Thomas Menditto, district coordinator of science, technology and applied education. "It was a nice learning experience for our students, both in tech education and honors science. They gelled very well."

In October, the team traveled to Philadelphia to compete against more than 25 teams along the northeast corridor. There, they received the rookie award and placed first in both the oral presentation category and the table display category. They placed second in the robotics competition.

Following their success in Philadelphia, 23 of the team members traveled to Alabama for the South regional competition held at Auburn University. They had the opportunity to visit with NASA astronaut Story Musgrave, who pointed out the parallels between the challenges posed by the competition and those faced by NASA.

"What these students are doing prepares them for the real world," said Musgrave. "They learn what it takes to bring an idea to fruition, to test it and refine it. The ability and drive to solve problems makes the difference between success and failure."

Menditto hopes to see increased involvement in BEST across the state.

Already, the district is reaching out to other schools and is building a robotics relationship with Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), which could be beneficial for students in future competitions.

"We have a nice association," said Menditto. "CCSU now has a robotics program, which is leading into engineering courses over there. There's potential for student teaching and summer programs."

To keep their minds active this spring, the robotics students built a solar car under the guidance of high school teachers Steven Wollins and John Ouellette.

"They developed a lot of planning skills, learning about concepts and applying energy, mechanics and mathematics," said Menditto. "It gives the kids a way to be engaged in their learning."



Winners of the DaVinci Bowl district math competition, from left, Zachery Scholz, Danny Annear and Randall Mel revisit some of the problems from the event.

PHOTO: REBA SALDANHA

## DaVinci de-coded

### New competition tests students' math skills; Holmes takes first title

By CAITLIN BOWLER

With the arrival of the DaVinci Bowl onto the New Britain elementary school scene, math joins spelling and geography as subjects enlivened by the fun and excitement of organized competition.

When the inaugural competition was completed, the four-person team from Holmes Elementary School proudly claimed the first DaVinci Bowl's title.

In addition to their title as DaVinci Bowl champions, the four members of the Holmes School team — Danny Annear, May La, Randall Mel, and Zachary Scholz — were selected to throw out the first ball at the annual school field trip to the minor league baseball Rock Cats game.

The event, organized by Paula Banas, coordinator for mathematics instruction, engaged talented fourth- and fifth-graders from all 10 of the district's elementary schools in three rounds of team competition that culminated in an on-stage match at Pulaski Middle School between teams from Holmes, Smalley Academy and Vance Village.

Questions were projected onto a large screen and each team, comprised of two fourth-graders and two fifth graders, worked together to solve the problems.

"The competition," Banas explained, "was designed to get kids to work cooperatively. When you eventually go to work you're rarely performing alone; you're working together in groups with colleagues. This gives kids good exposure to that principle."

A two-part exam with questions measuring skills and skill application

was administered at the school level and based on those results a team of four students from each of the elementary schools was chosen to compete in a district competition held at the Board of Education office. The three teams with the highest scores from the district level competition moved on to the DaVinci Bowl.

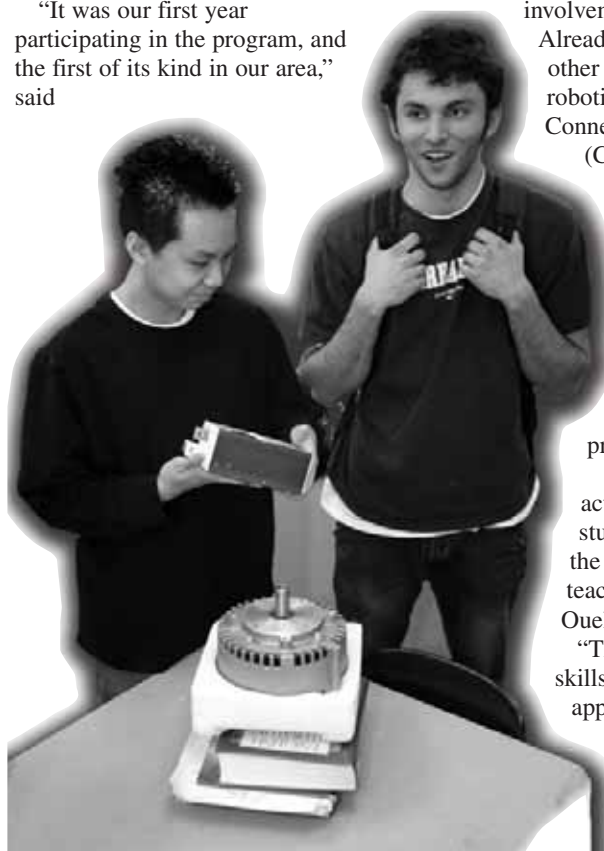
The questions at the bowl involved numerical reasoning, algebra, probability and statistics, and geometry, the four categories targeted by the Connecticut Mastery Test. Questions had skill problems embedded in word problems, challenging students to apply skills they had learned in the classroom.

"The kids had fun and were excited," said Banas. With parents, family, and friends looking on, the competition also served as a great showcase.

"Parents," said Banas, "were surprised by the level of math that their children had mastered. Many came up to me afterward saying, 'This is what we did in middle school.' Now our kids are being exposed to a lot more at an earlier age and this was a really great way to show the community that it's happening."

Math teachers in the elementary schools were very supportive of the event and Banas would like to hold it again next year. Expanding the event to the middle schools is also a possibility.

"It's a great event," she said. "It gave everyone a clear idea of what we expect of our children and what they are capable of. All kids have a natural aptitude for math and we need events like this to make sure that everyone values this and to give math some exposure."



New Britain High School BEST robotics team members Cuong Tran, left, and Zbigniew Ciechanowski check out parts for the solar car they were building.



# HIGHER LEARNING

La Pensée Académie will employ innovative methods to challenge New Britain's youngest, most-proficient readers

By GRETCHEN WEBER

Dozens of first-, second- and third-graders with advanced literacy skills are going to get the chance to put their talents to use in exceptional ways next fall when they start classes at La Pensée Académie, New Britain's newest smaller learning community.

The academy, which will eventually grow to include grades four and five, has been designed to use classical literature and art to encourage students' development of communication, systematic thought, and innovative problem solving. Teachers will employ cross-curricular themes to engage students in interesting and important topics and ideas that extend beyond any one subject.

"Our intent is to advance students' academic, personal, and social development through the use of classic literature and to teach them to make real world connections beyond the stories," said Deb Kess, a district-wide resource teacher for gifted and talented students grades 6-12.

To do this, La Pensée Académie

will employ systems-thinking approaches and strategies similar to the ones piloted this past year with the Cognitive Connections program, which help students gain a sophisticated appreciation of the interdependencies in the world.

Lessons will be designed to develop students' ability to ask questions, generate and connect ideas, and to think logically and creatively.

Students will work with analogies and metaphors, and they will explore varied genres and writing styles in works of literature that feature a wide range of in-depth concepts, extensive vocabulary, and increased opportunities for language development and word analysis.

"There's a whole list of books we can use to teach these skills that are in line with what people think of as children's classical literature," said

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Mulqueen. "Dr. Seuss books, for example, can be used to teach simple things such as cause and effect."

Other possible books to be used at La Pensée are Paul McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings*, Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* series, A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, and E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*.

"We're so very excited about this program," said Kess. "It shows real vision to create an innovative program like this for the elementary grades and to introduce these ideas at such a young age when the students are so interested in exploring."

Art will be another key component of the curriculum at La Pensée. Incorporating art from varied cultures and periods into lessons will

encourage students to think abstractly as they master different subject areas.

In addition to literature and arts-based instruction, La Pensée will also have a Mandarin Chinese component. Two guest teachers from China will spend the year in New Britain teaching Mandarin language and Chinese culture at both the high school and La Pensée. By being introduced to Chinese characters so early, students at La Pensée will be able to achieve advanced levels of Mandarin by the time they are in high school.

"We are preparing students to be ready to take Chinese in middle school and in high school at advanced levels," said Adnelly Marichal, district coordinator of bilingual education, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and world languages. "It's difficult to start at level one in high school. There's so much research that says the sooner you start the better. Our brains are more open to learning languages when we are young."

## Literature program helps students make a connection

Cognitive Connections is an innovative, research-based literature program that teaches students how to engage in creative problem-solving processes using literature to generate and connect ideas.

Through this kind of systems thinking, students develop skills that enable them to more effectively interpret the world around them and to gain greater confidence and competence for managing their lives and the situations they encounter. Components of the process

include timelines, understanding shades of meaning, visualization, hypothesizing, interaction and cooperation, comparing and contrasting, analysis of complex interactions and events, and evaluation and prediction.

This spring, four Cognitive Connections classes targeted for proficient readers were held at Jefferson Elementary School, two for grades K-2 and two for grades 3-5, on the first two Saturdays of March, April, and May from 9 a.m. to noon.

The goals of the classes were for students to use literature to generate and connect ideas, access their creativity by using complex problem solving processes, and learn to contribute to the innovative thinking of a group.

Because these classes were so successful, New Britain has decided to use Cognitive Connections as the model for learning at the new smaller learning community, La Pensée Académie, which will open this fall.

PHOTOS: PAULA MULLER

4 Barbara Lucas reads to her class.

5 Jefferson second-grader Kaitlyn Salerno enjoys a book.



1 Alexandra Traunfeld keeps an eye on teacher Kathy Bannon in a first-grade Cognitive Connections class at Jefferson Elementary School.

2 Second-grade teacher Barbara Lucas looks to students Lewis Robinson (hand up) and Trejon Stewart to answer a question.

3 Kindergarten teacher Kevin Anderson and student Joseph Benitez participate in some group reading at Jefferson.



# Building the successful teenager

## Program at Roosevelt teaches teens awareness and responsibility



Travis Reyes examines material used during the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* seminar at Roosevelt Middle School.

PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

BY CAITLIN BOWLER

How do you define “effective” and how do you define “success”?

Anticipating as many responses as there were students, educators asked this question to an audience of eighth-grade students and their parents at a new two-day workshop held at Roosevelt Middle School May 4 and 6, entitled *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, to begin a discussion with students about the habits and qualities students could cultivate on their own to achieve success in high school and beyond.

“The ability,” explained Dr. Jon Walek, director of pupil services and a facilitator at the workshop, “to attribute successes and failures to one’s own actions and characteristics is critical to success in life. In this workshop we were trying to get students to see how different characteristics can improve their success, and that

they can and need to develop those characteristics within themselves. Helping these kids develop awareness was one of our primary goals.”

Educators based the workshop in part on Sean Covey’s bestselling book, *“Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens,”* in which Covey identifies seven habits and characteristics that teenagers can adopt to achieve success. These include being proactive, defining goals, prioritizing, maintaining a good attitude, persevering, working together, listening well and taking care of oneself, both physically and mentally.

Juniors in the National Honor Society who had already proven themselves in academics, athletics, the arts and community, were trained to lead discussions with the eighth-graders in small groups. By using lessons learned from their own experience, juniors were able to give the students examples to which they could relate, while

at the same time serving as role models for the younger students.

“Our goal in using an interactive format,” Walek explained, “was to have kids do some of the explaining on their own and gain some insight themselves.”

Parents who sat in on lessons taught by juniors said they really liked how the older students used personal examples to get their messages across.

“Parents were very happy,” said Roosevelt guidance counselor Pat Morrell. “The juniors conveyed the message that there are characteristics students can adopt to become successful. It’s a positive and realistic message.”

The workshop, which was voluntary, was held outside regular school hours. To increase participation, educators would like to hold the workshop again in the fall in the ninth grade during the school day.

## Superintendent’s book club aims to connect parents with school system

In New Britain students aren’t the only ones meeting with peers to discuss books, share insights, and gain new perspective.

Last fall, Superintendent Dr. Doris Kurtz launched a book club designed specifically for parents with children in the city’s school system after a series of discussions between Kurtz and parents from her Parents Partnership Team.

“We have a lot of very bright parents who are readers and learners,” said Kurtz.

“Parents stressed to me that they wanted to learn more about education itself in addition to ways to help their children.”

The book club is exclusively for parents, who together with the superintendent choose the books. This year’s selections were “Emotional Intelligence,” by Daniel Goldman; “Seven Habits of Highly Effective

Teens,” by Sean Covey; “How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk,” by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish; and “Freakonomics,” by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner.

So far, the book club has been a success.

“It has helped me to get to know another group of parents,” says Kurtz, “and for them to know me. Our discussions have been collegial, lively, and deep.”

The Parents Partnership Team is a group of parents who volunteer at the beginning of the year and meet with the superintendent four times a year to discuss areas of interest to them. They also review and evaluate the District Parental Involvement Plan.

Parents who would like to get involved with either of these groups should contact the district at the end of August.

## New system helps district stay ConnectED with parents

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

In March of 2005, a snowstorm hit the city of New Britain at mid-day, but school officials were forced to keep schools open because of insufficient means of communicating with all parents.

Subsequently, the Consolidated School District of New Britain has actively worked to close the communication gap between home and the classroom.

Last September, the district introduced an innovative new program, ConnectED, in an attempt to advance its outreach and reinforce a culture of student and parent accountability.

Built exclusively for K-12 educators, ConnectED enables administrators to record, schedule and send voice messages to thousands of parents in minutes.

Used largely to increase

community outreach, the system allows principals to remind parents of upcoming school events, alert them of last-minute changes to schedules and gather support for school initiatives. It also advances school and district emergency communication, instantly reaching parents in the event of emergencies or weather-related school closings.

“It’s about keeping kids safe,” said Ron Jakubowski, assistant superintendent for business and operations. “We wanted an effective tool to reach all parents and students, especially in emergency situations like early dismissals. We wanted to be able to reach parents directly at home or at work and not have to depend on radio announcements.”

ConnectED also has the capacity to communicate with individual parents regarding their

child’s history of attendance. Each school can quickly identify absent students and send out multilingual calls to parents, notifying them of attendance issues.

Another component of the system is the survey message, which enables parents to R.S.V.P. for school events or to provide input on school initiatives using their telephone keypad. The survey feature is also helpful for principals to communicate with their staff and coordinate schedules.

“It’s been fabulous on both ends,” said Jakubowski. “Principals use it to schedule meetings and communicate about report cards and attendance. We also rely on it for district-wide general announcements. Parents say it’s the best thing we’ve ever done.”

# Everybody Cut Loose!

## Footloose marks New Britain High's first musical in 30 years

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Adrenaline lit up the New Britain High School auditorium as student performers cut loose to the stage production of "Footloose."

"Footloose," the first musical performed at the school in 30 years, attracted a full house to the shows on March 31 and April 1. Involving more than 100 students, including 20 dancers who worked with a professional choreographer, "Footloose" was a departure from the school's past variety shows, which were limited to

performances by music students.

"It's a very diverse show, and it lends itself to a lot of kids participating," said Dr. Doris Kurtz, Superintendent of Schools. "It was great for them to be able to showcase their various talents."

"We wanted to branch out to the general public of the school, and not just target kids in the music department," said fine arts director Mark Neumann, who produced and directed the show. "It was important to choose a show that would invite a large cast."

"Footloose," made famous in the 1980's by Kevin Bacon, Lori Singer and Sarah



Students at New Britain High School perform a scene from *Footloose*.

Jessica Parker, is the story of a teenager who moves from Chicago to a small, conservative town where dancing is forbidden. The show features 16 musical numbers, including well-known hits, "Footloose," "Let's Hear It for the Boy" and "Holding Out For A Hero."

"'Footloose' was perfect because we wanted to do something young and hip – something that the kids would get excited about," said Neumann.

Senior Josh Lara starred as Ren, the newcomer who battles the town's authoritarian religious leaders for the right to dance. Lara also performs with the

high school's Madrigal Singers. James Demarco, a junior, played the role of Rev. Shaw Moore, a powerful and conservative local minister enforcing the town's no-dancing rule.

Freshman Caitlyn Falla, who has also performed locally and in Ireland as an Irish step dancer, played Moore's rebellious daughter Ariel. Junior Aki Sogunro, a member of the football, wrestling and track teams and new to acting, played the role of Willard, Ren's closest friend.

## New Britain JROTC program takes top honors in New England

BY COURTNEY DEVEAU

Dedicated to helping young people discover the best about themselves, the JROTC program at New Britain High School has developed into one of the most successful in New England.

The New Britain JROTC is one of thousands of programs around the country run by retired military officers and non-commissioned officers.

Mark Durfee, a lieutenant colonel who retired from the U.S. Army in 2001, is the leader of the New Britain program. First Sgt. Don Fairthorne has been with the program since its inception.

Durfee has found the experience of working with high school students in his post-military career to be very rewarding.

"I can't imagine doing anything else,"

Durfee said. "The kids really grow on you and every day with them is exciting."

Part teacher, part commanding officer, Durfee is entrusted with the task of educating young men and women in the ways of the military as well as helping them to develop into productive and successful members of society.

"We use techniques based on military experiences to bring out the best in kids," said Durfee.

That sentiment is at the core of the JROTC mission statement: "To motivate young people to be better citizens." JROTC has motivated a large population of students at New Britain High School, with 145 students taking part in the co-ed program.

"We give everyone who comes an opportunity to succeed," said Durfee.

JROTC is run as an elective course at New

Britain High. The students in the JROTC program follow a schedule that is intended to ensure that they become well rounded, well educated and self-sufficient.

The students have two days of academics dedicated to a variety of topics, including history, living skills, first aid, health and nutrition.

"We're trying to teach these kids skills and lessons that they can use to better

themselves," said Durfee.

In addition to the academic work, students also have a day of exercise and athletics and a day of drill work. The students are also required to wear their full uniforms for a day of inspection that they are trained to perform for themselves.

"The kids lead this program so that they can learn how to teach and how to lead," said Durfee.

Within the JROTC program, there are different venues of competition. There is a drill team that competes against other drill teams throughout the region. There is also a color guard that not only competes against other programs, but also takes part in various ceremonies in the community. Finally, there is a Raiders team that competes in military skills and athletic competitions, including physical fitness, orienteering and other team activities.

The New Britain JROTC drill team has finished first for the past two years, and the Raiders are defending champions as well.

The competitive aspect of JROTC is one more avenue for the participating students to challenge themselves and to develop into hard-working and motivated individuals.



The New Britain High JROTC program is ranked No. 1 in New England.

While the JROTC program fosters strong ties to the military, the participants are under no obligation to armed forces. Of the 145 students participating, just a handful are seniors. Durfee estimated that only four or five were planning to pursue a career in the military.

The students who participate in JROTC enter the military with a higher rank, starting as a private first class. To Durfee, however, JROTC is about a lot more than just attaining a higher ranking.

"The students in this program learn leadership skills and confidence. They learn to speak in front of others; they learn how to work under pressure; and they learn how to make things happen. These are things that open a lot of doors for them," Durfee said.



New Britain High School JROTC drill team captain David Lombardo runs a drill as First Sgt. Don Fairthorne looks on.





# AVID learning



BY CAITLIN BOWLER

As the school year draws to a close, 48 sixth- and seventh-grade students at the Slade and Roosevelt Middle Schools will be the second group of students to have benefited from the AVID program, and their teachers and parents couldn't be happier.

Educators launched the Advancement Via Individual Determination program two years ago to provide average students who have shown academic potential with the additional guidance they need to develop their study skills in order to excel in high school and college.

Instructors meet with the AVID student group three times a week to focus on note-taking, organization, time management, writing, reading and inquiry — the kinds of soft skills that are critical to success in all academic disciplines and professions. Additionally, there are tutoring sessions twice a week where instructors coach students on their questioning skills so they become better at solving problems.

Gina West, a sixth-grade instructor at Slade Middle School, said the results are compelling.

"Attendance is way up. Organization has been hugely improved. Attitudes towards school and teachers have improved," West said. "Everything has changed. I've been a teacher for 13 years and I've seen programs come and go. I really hope that AVID is here to stay. It's the first program that



Roosevelt Middle School AVID program students are all smiles.

targets middle-of-the-road kids who have a lot of potential, but just need a little support and guidance."

With the goal of motivating students to prepare for the future, guest lectures by professionals and tours of college campuses are another important component of the program.

Language arts resource teacher and Roosevelt Middle School AVID instructor Rosalina Monarca said, "We are constantly asking our kids, 'Where are you going?' Before AVID many of them would not have answered, 'College,' but they do now."

Adopting the program has not been without its challenges. Students who choose to participate must sacrifice half of the time spent in their unified arts classes to meet with the AVID instructors, which requires flexibility on the part of students and teachers.

"It takes commitment and integrity of all teachers to get the program to work," said West. "People throughout the school system and community are buying into it — teachers, kids, and parents — because the results have been compelling."

Monarca noted that one of the biggest

improvements has been in the self-esteem of these students, who were often not as engaged in school activities as some of their more confident peers.

"These kids," said Monarca, "are now volunteering to lead school plays, emcee poetry slams, and they volunteer frequently in their other classes. The kids feel like they're part of a family that's there to support them. We've seen big changes and it's really exciting."

Students are targeted by their fifth-grade teachers and go through an interview process, along with their parents, so that all involved understand the program's opportunities and demands. AVID is currently offered in sixth and seventh grade, but administrators are working to expand the program into eighth grade and beyond.

AVID is in place in more than 2,200 middle and high schools in 36 U.S. states and 15 countries. Since 1990, more than 30,000 AVID students have graduated from high school and 95 percent have enrolled in college.

The positive effects of the program have spilled over to the entire school community.

"I've been teaching for 15 years," said Monarca, "and my work with the AVID program has gotten me excited about teaching all over again. My students are excited about having a better future and that's what my job is all about."

## It's elementary: Northend building for future

**NORTHEND:** from page 1

feature a new roof, new plumbing and flooring, and mechanical and electric upgrades. Parents, faculty and staff will also be pleased with the school's new parking area.

"We purchased land next to the school to expand the parking lot," said Ray Moore, director of facilities management. "It's important to be moving the cars out of the kids' play area."

Northend's renovations almost bring a conclusion to the overhaul of all New Britain schools, which began more than two decades ago. Lincoln and Vance elementary schools, which were renovated last year, have provided a home to the displaced Northend students and staff during this year's construction.

"The transitioning of our K-2 children to Lincoln and 3-5 students

to Vance has validated that the Northend community of parents, faculty, staff and students truly is a team that collaborates to create a positive learning climate for all our students," said Saavedra-Rodriguez.

Next on the agenda will be a new addition to New Britain High School, which will ease overcrowding and provide better facilities for students and staff. Construction bids for the project opened on May 15 and came in under budget. The renovation project, estimated at \$13.2 million, will include 19 new classrooms, a lecture hall and a refurbished area for special education and physically handicapped students.

Superintendent Dr. Doris Kurtz hopes to use the leftover money to add a foreign-language lab at the school and do more landscaping around the building.



Ray Moore, district director of facilities for New Britain schools, points out an original water fountain that will remain functional in the Northend Elementary School's new library.

PHOTO: REBA SALDANHA



# AROUND

## New Britain

# SCHOOLS

### Chamberlain Elementary School

Chamberlain was proud to reach Adequate Yearly Progress in all sub-groups.

### Diloreto Magnet School

The school hosted the Diloreto Reads program, Cinco de Mayo activities and Gingerbread Rock'n Kindergarten events.

### Gaffney Elementary School

More than 500 students, parents and teachers attended Gaffney School's eighth annual Celebrate the Arts on April 7. The event was a culmination and display of student art, writing, music and dance. The evening was enjoyed by all, as parents and guests viewed the creative works of the students.

On March 29, Gaffney students spent on evening with Clifford the Big Red Dog. Students met Clifford, had their pictures taken, enjoyed a pizza supper and selected a Clifford book to take home and enjoy.

### Holmes Elementary School

Homes continued to support the arts by taking every child to the Lincoln Theatre for a production and having the third-graders participate in the multicultural program at the Hill-Stead Museum.

Friday morning breakfasts for staff continue to build and strengthen school teamwork. A staff that eats together works well together.

### Jefferson Elementary School

Jefferson Elementary School's Hotstix group — formerly known as Jefferson Drumline — practice 30 minutes a week before school, under the direction of L. Prokop. None of the 12 students, in grades 3-5, has ever had formal training. Yet, the more they perform, the better they get. They have been invited to perform throughout the city of New Britain, as well as in some neighboring towns.

### Lincoln Elementary School

Lincoln School is beginning the process of restructuring its organization. This entails using inclusive school practices such as clustering students according to their needs, increasing collaboration time and revamping and developing a more effective schedule. The school will be working with certified trainers from Education Connection to provide ongoing professional development.

### Northend Elementary School

A group of staff members collaborated to furnish the new apartment of a colleague, one of the cafeteria aides at the school. The school came together in a time of need to collect many items she needed.

### Smalley Academy

Smalley's fifth-grade Invention Convention Center was a huge success. Students displayed their creative inventions to a wide panel of judges. The students were proud to present their hard work and creative inventions. Finalists were selected to go on to the state finals.

### Smith Elementary School

Smith hosted a family reading night with storytellers and literary characters. To celebrate Read Across America, the school hosted Rockin' Reader Day with local community and state celebrity readers.

Smith's school mascot changed from the Mustangs to the Scholars, through a student-generated naming contest. The school is now home to the Scholarly Owl.

### Vance Village Elementary School

Vance staff members have embraced data driven decision making and are excited about getting CMT scores early enough to plan for the 2006-07 school year.

A parent who is a yoga instructor volunteered to facilitate a yoga class for a group of second- and third-graders involved in the MicroSociety health and wellness venture. It was a beautiful warm day and the class was held in the courtyard. About 20 minutes into the session, the entire group of

otherwise very busy, bouncing boys and girls were relaxed to the point of sleeping.

### Pulaski Middle School

At the 10th annual Math/Science Family Night, attendance increased. Families enjoyed problem-solving, playing games and conducting science experiments participating with their children. Former students, now at the high school, came back to help monitor and run the games and bring in new ideas.

The media department hosts a yearly poetry slam in the spring. The number of students participating, as well as the quality of poetry, has grown each year.

In another event — Iron Chef Pizza — students work as a team to plan what they want their pizza to be, write out the process and present their goal to the judges. Judges taste each pizza to see if it meets their criteria.

### Roosevelt Middle School

Students in the AVID program have really blossomed and are among the most organized students. They have better grades and have achieved at a faster pace than was expected. AVID has also injected excitement and a new sense of purpose among the teachers involved. More teachers now want to be trained and want to bring AVID-based teaching strategies to their classrooms.

### Slade Middle School

From January to April, 19 teachers participated in the school's Biggest Loser competition, promoting healthy eating and losing a percentage of their body fat.

### New Britain High School

The high school saw a significant increase in the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) participation rate.

American Studies, combining American Literature with American History, will be taught as one unit for the time at the start of the 2006-07 school year. For juniors, global studies will also be taught for the first time.

## Educator wins national acclaim



New Britain Superintendent Dr. Doris J. Kurtz holds the Communicator Award of Distinction, presented by an association in Arlington, Texas, that recognizes outstanding work in education and communications. This is the second such award won by *The New Britain Educator*. Dr. Kurtz was also honored as Southern Connecticut State University's Educational Leader of the Year, in recognition of her unprecedented state-wide leadership and accomplishments. The award was presented at a black-tie dinner at the Omni Hotel at Yale University.

## New Britain School Directory

**Chamberlain Elementary**  
Sharon Cicio, Principal  
120 Newington Ave.  
(860) 832-5691

**Diloreto Magnet School**  
Sharon O'Brien, Principal  
732 Slater Road  
(860) 223-2885

**Gaffney Elementary**  
Don DelBiondo, Principal  
322 Slater Road  
(860) 225-6247

**Holmes Elementary**  
Glenn Horter, Principal  
2150 Stanley St.  
(860) 223-8294

**Jefferson Elementary**  
Margaret Walsh, Principal  
140 Horse Plain Road  
(860) 223-8007

**Lincoln Elementary**  
Cynthia Cassada, Principal  
145 Steele St.  
(860) 229-2564

**New Britain High School**  
Dr. Thomas Reale, Principal  
110 Mill St.  
(860) 225-6351

**Northend Elementary**  
Elsa Saavedra-Rodriguez, Principal  
160 Basset St.  
(880) 223-3819

**Pulaski Middle School**  
Elizabeth Ann Carabillo,  
Principal  
757 Farmington Ave.  
(860) 225-7665

**Roosevelt Middle School**  
Vaughn Ramseur, Principal  
40 Goodwin St.  
(860) 612-3334

**Slade Middle School**  
Mark Fernandes, Principal  
183 Steele St.  
(860) 225-6395

**Smalley Academy**  
Braulio Santiago, Principal  
175 West St.  
(860) 225-8647

**Smith Elementary**  
Paula Eshoo, Principal  
142 Rutherford St.  
(860) 223-1574

**Vance Village Elementary**  
Mary Beth Iacobelli, Principal  
183 Vance St.  
(860) 225-8731

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# SPORTS

THE NEW BRITAIN EDUCATOR

## SHOOTING STRAIGHT TO THE TOP

### New Britain still celebrating girls hoop championship

BY CAITLIN BOWLER

Players, coaches, and fans may have already battled through another wet and chilly New England spring athletic season, either on the track, diamond, tennis courts or links, but nearly three months after the New Britain High girls basketball team put in its second appearance ever in the Class LL State Final, the memory of its win against Mercy-Middletown has not even begun to fade.

"Oh yeah," said coach Beryl Piper, "it's still really exciting. It was a really big win."

The entire school community and city have contributed to the celebrations, which peaked at a rally held at the New Britain Rock Cats Stadium where the high school band, the JROTC Drum Corps, and performers from Jefferson Elementary School all added to the celebration.

Members of the team accepted congratulations for their feat and had the opportunity to express gratitude for all the support they received from family, friends, coaches, educators, and basketball enthusiasts throughout the city. They capped off the evening by throwing out commemorative state title T-shirts to the crowd.

With a regular season record of 17-3, impressive shooting percentages that led the team to average 80 points a game for a stretch, the team was a pleasure to watch throughout the winter.

"This team," said Piper, "was the most athletic team I've ever coached. They weren't big, but they could rebound and win loose balls because they were very quick and nimble."

The Hurricanes kicked off the tournament with a bye, and proceeded through their first two tournament games with relative ease, handily beating first Newtown then Masuk. The 'Canes finally broke a sweat against third-seeded Manchester, but won the semifinal match 72-62.

In front of a crowd of 2,500 at Central Connecticut State University, the 'Canes got off to a rather tentative start against top-seeded Mercy, with the score tied at 27 at halftime. But senior captains Sharnise Beal and Julia Fagan showed their leadership, and pushed their teammates to focus mentally and step up the effort physically.

The push paid off and after less than four minutes the 'Canes had pulled ahead by 10. Mercy continued to battle, shrinking the lead to as little as 5, but with just a minute left, the 'Canes prevailed with a final score of 67-53.

This is the team's second state title, having won the first in 1998.

"It's pretty impressive to have won twice," said Piper, "especially considering that in the 33 years since this tournament has been held, only 13 Class LL schools have even won one championship. No doubt, this was pretty good."



Sarah Sideranko gets set to go by a Mercy-Middletown defender.



Coach Beryl Piper and players hold aloft the state championship trophy.