

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

New Higgins is on the way

By MEAGHAN CASEY

As one of the largest middle schools on the East coast, J. Henry Higgins Middle School has seen thousands of students exit its doors – doors that will be shut for the last time in 2016, when a state-of-the-art new building opens and a new chapter in the school’s history begins.

The school’s new construction project was green-lighted by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) last summer. The MSBA voted in July to move Higgins into the Schematic Design Phase. The Peabody School Committee voted Feb. 12 to send along the schematics for the new school with detailed renderings to the MSBA, following a public presentation of those plans. On April 3, the MSBA approved \$43.7 million in funding for the \$92 million project. On May 23, the Peabody City Council unanimously approved the project.

See **HIGGINS** Page 9



Architect's rendering of the new Higgins Middle School.



INSIDE THE INAUGURAL EDITION OF THE PEABODY EDUCATOR

Above, Higgins Middle School eighth-grader Sonia Bakas helps Carroll School fourth-grader Peter Qirjazy with his homework as part of an after-school tutoring program.

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At left, members of the Peabody High DECA team had a chance to visit Disneyland while in California to compete in the International Career Development Conference.

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Plenty of good news to report in schools



EDWARD BETTENCOURT

Welcome to the inaugural edition of The Peabody Educator. The intent of this publication is simple: to share with our stakeholders the accomplishments of our students and staff, so that you might get a clear picture of what transpires in our schools on a daily basis.

The fiscal challenges facing our city, state and country have been well documented.

Everyone is being asked to do more with less in both the public and private sectors.

Regardless of circumstances, however, one area in which we must never accept anything but the best is education.

Our teachers, students and administrators are to be commended for putting forth their best effort on a daily basis. While we are not immune to the challenges faced by other districts, what is most important is how we respond. I think you will agree that Superintendent Mastrocola and his team are meeting the challenges head-on, and have put a plan in place to give all students the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

In this edition you will read about the plans for a new Higgins Middle School. We are extremely pleased that this project has moved forward, and we anxiously await the day when our grade 6-8 students are learning in a state-of-the-art, 21st-century facility.

I believe this edition provides a wide-angle view of our district, highlighting initiatives in the areas of anti-bullying, tutoring and mentoring, and extracurricular activities such as

marketing and athletics. Our students are learning and achieving in and out of the classroom.

The Peabody Educator will be a vehicle for our school district to showcase the excellent programs and events that may otherwise have been overlooked. I can assure you that

Peabody's schools are thriving; our students are learning at impressive rates; and our principals, teachers and staff members are among the best in the state.

In closing, on behalf of the superintendent and the entire district, I would like to thank the Peabody Education Foundation for providing funding that helped make this edition possible, as well as its ongoing support of Peabody Public Schools. We sincerely appreciate it.

Edward A. Bettencourt Jr. is mayor of Peabody.



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Getting back to the real basics



JOSEPH MASTROCOLA

Much is made in all school systems, Peabody included, about establishing and maintaining a focus on the "basics." While most educators, parents and taxpayers would likely associate that word with reading, writing and mathematics, the tragedies of Newtown,

Conn. and the 2013 Boston Marathon transcend that association to far more fundamental, and relevant, basics.

The research around "good schools" usually has several key tenets: They are clean, safe, orderly, and have high expectations for learning. We believe the staff and parents of Peabody Public Schools strive to accomplish such an environment for our children.

The safety factor has been front and center these past few months, and will require a new and direct focus on pre-existing variables about those basics with regard to safety as this school year ends and we prepare for the 2013-14 school year.

In a recent edition of "YES!" magazine," author Francis Moore Lappe pointed to the keys to ending violence across the mainstream impact places in our society, e.g., the home, community, schools, etc.

Lappe writes: "Pride, dignity, respect, agency — a sense that we matter — these are feelings largely shaped interpersonally. We depend upon the social fabric to get them. But for many, these things are in tatters. Fewer and fewer of us feel a sense of belonging, and we're more and more preoccupied with the desperate scramble for belongings."

"Our children are most sensitive to this fear of exclusion," Lappe adds.

Our schools strive to establish and maintain a culture of pride, dignity, and respect. Our teachers are the mainstay of delivering teaching-and-learning experiences and outcomes for our children to create a culture for these vital entities to flourish. We are all hoping and expecting that such nurturing will create responsible and law-abiding adults.

We have, however, seen and felt a small, but significant minority of our adults becoming menacing forces in our country and direct threats to the safety of children and adults alike. While our homes and schools

cannot provide any guarantee to keep front-page events from recurring, we can refocus on assuring and reassuring all of our children that they truly "belong;" that such belonging creates goodness among each other; that such belonging inherently creates a more constructive fabric in the home and in the classroom.

What is our best course of action in our schools to keep our children even safer, while developing lifelong basics to hopefully reduce the prevalence of violence in our society?

"This pathway out of a violence," Lappe writes, "is what's proven essential to our species' thriving — communities of trust ... We are creatures who, in order to thrive individually, depend on inclusive communities in which all can thrive."

We need to strive with even more sensitivity to creating and sustaining that "community of trust" in every one of our Peabody schools.

Getting back to that basic is our reinvigorated mission, because our children truly matter.

Joseph Mastrocola is superintendent of schools.

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Homework a team effort at Carroll

By RICH FAHEY

Sometimes, it isn't a case of the dog eating your homework. Sometimes, it's a case of not having an area where you can work free from distractions, or a child whose organizational skills have not yet fully developed, or a child who hasn't grasped a concept fully enough to ask for help. Or there might not be someone available to help.

Because there are students who for whatever reason find it hard to get their homework done, Carroll Elementary School grade 4 teacher Bradlee Tattan has been running an after-school homework program for grade 4 students three days a week from the end of September until the beginning of June.

Tattan welcomes the students for 35 quiet minutes on those days, and students can get help from her when needed.

Students who are candidates for the National Junior Honor Society at Higgins Middle School are available to help students.

"We're not here to give you the answers to your homework," said Tattan. "We're here to give you the support you need so that, with your due diligence, we can get to the answer."

Sometimes, she said, it's simply a matter of re-reading the directions.

Parents have embraced the program, and Tattan also gets referrals from teachers who students are struggling to get their homework completed.

Tattan said the program would never have lasted for the eight years it has if it weren't for the cooperation of all those involved, include parents who faithfully show up on time to

pick up their students.

Tattan said the program has had the support of former principal and current assistant superintendent Cara Murtagh, Paul Guerrette, the school's interim principal, and Assistant Principal Melanie Coffin, as well as teachers Julie Besse and Barbara Arsnow, all of whom have worked to make the program "available and accessible" to students who might benefit from it.

"Without their support, it wouldn't exist," said Tattan. "I am simply a facilitator. It's the children, administrative team, and parents who make it work."

Tattan also allows younger siblings of grade 4 students at the school to also attend, if they can handle the extra 35 minutes at the end of a long school day.

"We make it clear this is not a time for video games, but a strong academic after-school support program," said Tattan.

One of the reasons the program works is because students are still in school mode so soon after school.

"We're seizing on the momentum of the day and there's no interruption in learning," she said.



Higgins Middle School eighth-grader Rachel Ellis works with Carroll School student Ava Manganiello.
PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

Because there are a limited number of slots, students are also expected to attend faithfully, or they can be removed from the roster.

By this time of year, Tattan said she has opened up slots for grade 3 students. There are grade 5 students who have been part of the program in grade 4 who have also been allowed to come back. In all, there are 20-25 students participating on any given day.

West point: support for military members

By RICH FAHEY

The students and staff at the West Elementary School wear their heart — and their patriotism — on their sleeves.

And the government has taken notice.

On Feb. 5, the school proudly accepted the Seven Seals Award, which is awarded by a national committee from the Department of Defense called the ESGR — Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

The ESGR has a committee in each state who work with citizen-soldiers to form a stronger bond between soldiers and their employers, through a greater understanding of their military service. Seven Seals signifies the seals of all seven branches of the armed forces.

The Seven Seals award is the second highest award of the Massachusetts committee and is presented to those employers "who demonstrate the highest levels of support for our service members."

West School Principal Thomas Cornacchio accepted the award for his staff's "outstanding" efforts with students to instill patriotism and respect for those



From left, Mayor Ted Bettencourt, George Charos, West Principal Tom Cornacchio, James Nicholson, Dave Nicholson and daughter Abbie Mae.

serving in the military.

The school was nominated for the award — which usually goes to businesses or agencies — by parent Dave Nicholson, 52, a staff sergeant and engineer in the National Guard. A former member of the 18th Airborne unit of the U.S. Army, Nicholson joined the Guard after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and is currently serving a nine-month tour in Afghanistan. His duties involve facilities management and training

Afghanis.

He has two of his three children at the West School — daughter Abbie Mae and son James — and he nominated Cornacchio and the school for such activities as its regular patriotic assemblies on Patriots, Memorial and Veterans Day, teaching students about the Gettysburg Address, caring for the school's flag, daily reciting the Pledge of Allegiance over the sound system and sending care packages to U.S.

soldiers overseas.

While the entire school was honored, Cornacchio and Vice Principal Kathleen Covino also received separate awards for "outstanding performance."

Massachusetts ESGR representative George Charos addressed West School students in their gym and marveled at the patriotic reception he received.

"I've never been anywhere, and I've been doing this almost 30 years, where they play music and saluted the flag," Charos said.

Cornacchio, in accepting his award, said his late father's experiences as a World War II veteran instilled in him a deep appreciation for citizen soldiers.

"He had a full football scholarship to Villanova and he gave that up to enlist in the Army Air Corps," said Cornacchio of his father, Joseph "Pep" Cornacchio of Salem. "He gave up the opportunity to go to college to serve his country."

"We're very lucky to have people who live in our city, in our country, like David Nicholson who gives of himself to protect all of us, and those are special people who deserve special recognition," said Mayor Ted Bettencourt.

Peabody High students driven to do their best

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

For Peabody Veterans Memorial High School senior Joseph Borgatti, a simple act of good character and high achievement rendered him the lucky winner of a certified pre-owned car.

Throughout the year, students could qualify for the grand prize through the Village Automotive Group's Keys to Success program, a year-long incentive program that encourages students to strive for excellence.

This is the sixth year of the program, and the third year it is being offered at Peabody High. Other schools that are currently participating are Danvers High School, Newton North High School and Waltham High School.

"Keys to Success is one of our most rewarding community programs," said Village Automotive Group's Founder and President Ray Ciccolo. "Every year to see deserving teens drive away in his or her own car is an incredibly gratifying experience for everyone involved."

"Education is a driving force in my life," said Ciccolo. "My family came from very modest means, but from my early days I learned that there is no limit to what you can achieve when you better yourself through education. Our hope here at Village Automotive is that Keys to Success helps motivate kids to see the limitless potential which awaits them when they strive to achieve in school."

Through the program, students are recognized and rewarded each month for showing improvement in academics, attendance, character, service and citizenship. They are nominated by teachers, administration or other staff members on an on-going basis and are awarded certificates, key cards and prizes such as ski passes, museum passes and movie and restaurant vouchers from sponsors. Peabody High recognized 300 students this year.

In May, 50 finalists were selected at random to participate in the final contest. Borgatti selected the lucky key that started the vehicle and was awarded the pre-owned car. "It's wonderful seeing the kids getting so excited," said Peabody High teacher Rosemary Slattery, who oversees the program at the school. "It's a chance to try to foster and recognize the good things are students are doing every day."



2013 Keys to Success winner Joseph Borgatti



Eric Buckley, who takes over as principal at Peabody High this summer, talks with student Gursharan Gill.

Home sweet home for new Peabody High principal

BY RICH FAHEY

The new principal of Peabody High won't have any trouble finding his way around the building.

Peabody native Eric Buckley, 45, who will take over as principal on July 1, has spent 21 of his 22 years in the district at the high school, including the last six years as assistant principal.

"We welcome Mr. Buckley as principal of the Peabody Veterans Memorial High School, and offer our full support when he begins his duties," said Superintendent of Schools Joseph Mastrocola, who made the final decision and announced his choice at the School Committee meeting on Feb. 26. "His experiences in teaching and administration, coupled with his student-centered approach, as well as his experience with the City of Peabody, all tailor his candidacy to our needs."

Buckley, who will be taking charge of about 1,800 students and 175 teachers at PVMHS, became assistant principal in 2007 when Ed Sapienza, who is currently acting as interim principal, became the school's principal.

"I think I have the pulse of the building, but there's still a huge learning curve when it comes to being the principal," he said. "If I don't succeed, it won't be from a lack of effort. I'm going to be part of the kids' lives."

Buckley said he is feeling well now after battling both Hodgkin's Lymphoma and non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, undergoing chemotherapy and eventually a stem cell transplant in 2011. The diseases are currently in remission. He is grateful for the support he has received from all over the city during his illnesses. His family and friends organized a bone marrow donor

drive after his successful transplant.

"The illnesses give you a perspective on things you might not have had beforehand," he said. "We have students here who are sick or homeless, or who have lost a parent. I feel that. We're a microcosm of the world as a whole."

Buckley also paid tribute to Sapienza, calling the moment "bittersweet" as his days working with him dwindle.

Sapienza has no doubt that his successor will be a success. "Eric has outstanding organizational skills. Over the past six years, he has had an opportunity to be part of every decision and program at the high school. He has attained one of the most important attributes of being a principal, which is mastering the complexities of building a master schedule of courses for more than 1,800 students," Sapienza said.

Sapienza said Buckley's experience as an assistant principal will be a tremendous asset. "He is an excellent role model for our students and staff," Sapienza said.

The selection of Buckley was also greeted warmly by Mayor Ted Bettencourt, who recalled being a student in Buckley's Contemporary Affairs class in Buckley's first year as a teacher.

Buckley expects to continue to be a fixture at school events, along with community involvement such as being a member of the Peabody Historical Society and a mainstay in the Peabody Relay for Life.

"Part of my job is to let people know about the great things happening here," he said. "We have some great programs and great kids who are going to 4-year schools, the military, or graduating from the vocational program with strong skills."

Buckley and his wife, Erin, have three children: Luke, Ryan and Sarah.

HIGGINS HELPING AWKS

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

It's not every day, in every school building, that sixth- and eighth-graders pass each other in the halls with shared smiles and a sense of camaraderie.

Yet that is just the type of atmosphere that exists at Higgins Middle School, where the peer mentoring program Higgins Helping Hawks is in its fourth year. The program is based on the proven power of student-to-student mentoring, where every incoming sixth-grader is mentored by an accomplished and caring upperclassman.

"Our upperclassmen possess an incredible advantage in shaping the lives of our younger students, who are often nervous or even fearful of their new environment," said Higgins Principal Todd Bucey. "Talking to an eighth-grader helps to motivate them and overlay their fears. That mentor is someone to turn to, other than their teachers. And when that same eighth-grader walks by and says hi to them in front of their classmates, it makes them feel like a million bucks."

Mentors are selected based on their application form and teacher recommendations. This school year, 120 mentors were selected, and each is partnered with three or

four students. They receive training from Core Trainings during the summer and are equipped at the start of the school year with the skills necessary to ease the transition period for their mentees, who may otherwise have felt disconnected or been prone to at-risk behavior.

"It's a win-win," said Bucey. "Our sixth-graders are connected to older students who care about them and our eighth-graders are enhancing their leadership skills."

Throughout the year, the mentors continue to provide ongoing support and guidance for the sixth-graders' academic and social success. On a monthly basis, they enter the sixth-grade classrooms to facilitate activities and discussions designed to address key issues that students face. Teachers Debbie Gigante and Melissa Cairns serve as advisors and help students plan and prepare for each session, which typically lasts 30 minutes.

As the program has evolved, it has expanded in popularity. For the past two years, the mentors have brought with them the unique perspective of having already participated in the program as sixth-graders. They can personally relate to and recognize the importance of their role in helping to steer their mentees through the social mine fields of middle school and reach new heights



Higgins Middle School eighth-grade mentors Colleen Guiney, left, and Katrina Allain

of success.

"It keeps getting stronger and stronger each year," said Bucey. "Because all of our students have experienced it by this point, it's engrained in the school culture. It's improved the overall climate of the school, creating positive connections and behaviors among our students."



Higgins Middle School eighth-grader Matthew Ball, left, mentors sixth-grader Jared Rathbun.

PHOTOS: PAULA MULLER



Clockwise from left, Madison Hentosh, Erin Kidd, Andrea Vega and Francesca Giangregorio get homework help from Colleen Guiney and Katrina Allain.

A BRIGHT FUTURE IS THEIR BUSINESS

Peabody students compete in DECA conference

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

When more than 15,000 high school students, advisors, alumni and business leaders gathered April 23 for the DECA International Career Development Conference (ICDC) in California, six Peabody students were among them.

“It’s an experience they will remember for their entire lives,” said Lenny Brand, teacher and DECA advisor, who accompanied the students on the trip.

DECA, which is a national organization for high school students enrolled in a marketing program, is the only student organization that prepares its members to be future leaders in the fields of marketing, management and entrepreneurship. Students compete with other DECA members from across the country in categories such as advertising, marketing, retail merchandising, food marketing, restaurant management, entrepreneurship and finance and credit. The competitions take place at district, state, and national conferences during the course of the school year.

Peabody High had a total of 12 teams compete in 12 different categories at the Massachusetts State Career Development Conference in March at the Marriott Copley in Boston. Six of those teams finished in the top 10 in the state and two teams qualified for ICDC.

Co-presidents and teammates Chris Ciampa and Shantel Silva, both juniors, finished fourth at the state conference and qualified for ICDC for the third year in a row.

Also traveling to California were: sophomores Gianni Farese, Danny Griffin, Anna Grimalyak and Aly Bortone.

“Going to ICDC freshman year (in Orlando), it was my first time on a plane,” said Ciampa, who also attended the conference in Salt Lake City last year. “It’s been an awesome experience.”

“Without this club, I wouldn’t know about business,” said Silva. “I’ve learned so much, and we’ve become such a family through DECA.”

This year, the pair tackled the public relations category, teaming up with Phil Richard Insurance of Danvers to sponsor an awareness campaign called Peabody CRAASH (Citizens Raising Awareness for Accidents, Safety and Hazards) to

urge students not to text while driving. As part of the campaign, they hosted school assemblies and raised enough money to provide every student at Peabody High with a T-shirt with a student-designed logo to enhance awareness to the cause.

Other top finishers in the state competition included sophomore Abby Hoffman, who placed eighth in the community service category. The Peabody DECA chapter raised \$1,195 for Haven from Hunger, and its members volunteered to serve dinner there one night.

“I didn’t think I liked business, but I learned it can be fun,” said Hoffman. “I loved meeting new people and discovering new interests.”

Sophomores Gabriela Molica and Amie Bonsaint finished seventh in the fashion merchandising category, drafting an 11-page paper conceptualizing their own store.

“It was fun because we had the freedom to create whatever we wanted,” said Bonsaint.

“I enjoyed having the chance to prove you can make something and succeed at it,” said Molica. “It was a good opportunity to learn about the real world.”

“The students put in a lot of hard work,” said Brand, who has served as an advisor for seven years. “It’s a big confidence-builder for these students to present in front of judges, and a lot of our graduates have gone on to pursue majors and careers in business management.”

Scott Diefenbach, a Peabody DECA alumnus, has returned to the program as a volunteer. Diefenbach graduated in 2008 and earned \$20,000 in college scholarships for his participation in DECA. He earned a degree in marketing and communications from Johnson & Wales University, graduating in 2012. He now works in online marketing.

“DECA opens up so many opportunities, between the scholarship funds and the contacts you make,” said Diefenbach.

1. Team members made a stop at Disneyland during their trip to Anaheim. 2. From left, Gabriela Molica, Abigail Hoffman and Amie Bonsaint. 3. Team co-presidents Chris Ciampa and Shantel Silva. 4. The Peabody High DECA team pictured at the state conference.. 5. From left, Gianna Costello, Christina Pescatore and Gianni Farese. PHOTOS: MEAGHAN CASEY



Community playground finds home at Welch School

If you build it, they will come. That is the hope at Welch Elementary School, where the dream for a school and community playground is coming to realization, providing a safe and accessible haven for the neighborhood's youth.

Planning for a playground was initiated in 2004 by Principal Dr. Monique B. Nappi, along with Devin Rozansky and Alisha Pena, who spearheaded the Friends of Welch School Playground Committee. The committee, which included parents, staff, community leaders and neighbors, had designed a fenced-in area for children ages 2-5 to explore and build their gross motor muscles while the adults enjoy the security of that play space. The second area was designed as an expansive exploratory structure for children ages 5-12, to be extensively used by Welch School students during their daily recess time.

The committee's first major achievement was obtaining the Kaboom video grant of \$15,000. During the subsequent fundraising portion of this project, the committee focused on safety and usability, raising funds to purchase and install a rubber surface underneath the playground equipment. They had a series of successful fundraisers including dine out nights, Flower Power Fundraiser, and \$1 days within the school. The committee also held a Clean up the Playground Day where a number of community members, the Endicott College softball team, and neighbors who do not have children at the Welch, came to the school to sweep, rake, weed, and paint the blacktop to make it more interesting for the children.

"Of second importance was ensuring the recreational

the completion of the playground.

"Through this generous contribution from the CPC and the Peabody City Council, the committee has actualized the amount needed to build the safe, secure and fun playground facility for the Welch School children and families in the neighborhood to gather and spend quality time together," said Nappi.

At the request of the Peabody Teachers Union and the Welch School Staff, the playground committee unanimously decided to dedicate the playground to Carol A. Papi, who was a teacher in Peabody Public Schools for 48 years – 37

of which at the Welch School. Papi retired in the spring of 2012 and the community was able to honor her at a dedication ceremony last June.

"The Welch School was proud to honor such an extraordinary educator on this fantastic day that had a great turn out of family, colleagues and friends," said Nappi.

Papi passed away on Sept. 5, 2012.

"We look forward to honoring a great person, teacher, colleague and citizen of Peabody as we formally dedicate the Welch School playground to her memory," said Nappi. "Today our dream is realized and we are grateful to many."

“Today
our dream is
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we are
grateful to
many.”

playground would be available to the general public," said Nappi. The Welch School is bordered on either side by densely populated residential neighborhoods and abuts O'Connor Field, where the Peabody Recreation Department runs a number of programs. Younger siblings of those attending the Recreation Dept. programs will now be able to play on the Welch School's safe playground structures, as will children in the neighborhood who do not have a playground within walking distance.

The final and most important source of funding for the project was obtained from the City of Peabody Community Preservation Committee grant, which allotted \$70,000 for



Principal Monique Nappi is joined by students, from left, Isabella Romero, Owen Rozansky, Maddox Romero, Adam Medrano, Morgan Rozansky, Becka Rawls, Kyle Maglione and Luke Maglione at the site of the future playground.

PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

Brown is Green

Elementary school is recycling champ

By RICH FAHEY

The Eagles have landed – squarely in the winner’s circle. That would be the grade 4 and 5 students who are members of the Brown School Environmental Eagles, who have been named Massachusetts Recycle Bowl state champions in the national contest sponsored by the Keep America Beautiful Foundation.

They recycled the most material per person of any school in the state and received a \$1,000 prize.

Grade 5 teacher Diane Bugler leads the Eagles, who are comprised of about two-thirds of the students in grade 5 with a few fourth-graders mixed in. The students managed to recycle about a dozen 65-gallon bins worth a material per week over a four-week period from mid-October to mid-November, which averaged out to about eight pounds per person at the school.

“The kids got to see just how much of our waste stream can easily be recycled,” said Bugler. “It was a great hands-on lesson for them.”

The \$1,000 prize is expected to go towards upgrading the headphones at the school’s computer lab.

Principal Elaine Metropolis, an enthusiastic supporter of the program, said it fits well with the “Brown being green” theme.

Bugler said students came early before school on



Mayor Ted Bettencourt presents Brown School \$1,000 donated by Keep America Beautiful Foundation for recycling the most material per person of any school in the state. PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

Thursdays to work on their recycling efforts. The Environmental Eagles also served as student ambassadors at a meeting of the National Green Schools Student Advisory Council at Mansfield High School. The council seeks to advance student voices when it comes to environmental education and literacy.

The Brown School hosted the city’s annual Greenfest on May 18, a daylong celebration in which the Peabody schools work in collaboration with the citywide Green Peabody Committee.

The GreenFest, which was held at the Torigian Community Center the past two years, included student science fair projects with environmental themes, exhibitors with products and services to help families save money on

energy, and create a safer and healthier home, arts and crafts with green themes, books on recycling, and electronic recycling.

Metropolis expounded on her philosophy and what she feels is her responsibility as an educator when it comes to the environment.

“In today’s world there is evidence all around us that we need to pay better attention to our Earth and its environment,” she said. “It is no longer just about educating our students about environmental issues, but also about engaging them in actual experiences where they can apply what they have learned. This way they can see that their efforts really can make a difference.”

New Higgins Middle School gets final approval

HIGGINS: from page 1

The new building will be constructed on the same lot of land as the existing facility, which was built in 1964. Higgins currently houses 1,520 students in a building with 52,000 square feet less than MSBA standards for a population that size. This translates into a school that has close to 20 percent less programmatic, learning and storage space, and creates specific overcrowding and in classrooms that house up to 28 students in less than 800 square feet.

In addition to the general lack of square footage in many classrooms, there are a number of classes that take place at Higgins in non-instructional spaces. Reading classes currently take place in portions of the library media center, a storage room, and in an office; foreign language classes take place in general education classrooms; and targeted math support classes are held in general education classrooms and portions of the library media center. Also, 10

science classes meet in classrooms without laboratories, water and adequate square footage, and the school is lacking in significant technological investments and infrastructure to meet today’s educational needs.

“Physical environment goes a long way, reflecting the achievement and sense of pride within a school’s walls,” said Higgins Principal Todd Bucey. “We have such pride right now, I can only imagine how it will grow within a brand new building, with 21st century technology.”

“Our commitment to working with Peabody officials to determine the best solution for the Higgins Middle School is ironclad,” said State Treasurer Steven Grossman, Chairman of the MSBA. “I toured the Higgins School, and I’ve seen firsthand the dedication of its teachers, administrators and students. This school is a top priority for the MSBA, and it will get built.”

The next step is to put the construction project out to bid. The new school is expected



Higgins Middle School students Daniela Sageri, Michael Fay and Caleb Dollin work on a project.

Something to sing about: Bullying not OK at McCarthy

By RICH FAHEY

It took a tragedy – the death of a South Hadley student named Phoebe Prince – for bullying to become a front-burner issue in the state.

In the aftermath of the tragedy came changes. Massachusetts passed a comprehensive anti-bullying law in May of 2010, and the Peabody School Committee followed suit that December, enhancing programs already in place.

But laws can't eliminate bullying overnight., so McCarthy Elementary School guidance counselor Karen Grenier is speaking out – make that singing out – against bullying with a song she has written and hopes to record, called “Bully Free,” an anthem that calls for students to stand together against bullying.

Grenier is a professional musician, and has her own iPhone app and CD on iTunes. She plays the guitar, writes and performs her own music as well as the music of others, and performs at area venues.

Grenier has used her musical skills to augment the efforts of McCarthy School music teacher Jennifer Joray, including writing special music and lyrics for a variety show at the school sponsored by the PTO.

“She’s very, very talented,” said McCarthy Principal Ray Smoyer. “We’re very fortunate to have her. She’s added tremendously to our school culture.”

As a guidance counselor for 16 years – except for three years when she was chasing her dream as a full-time musician – Grenier is in a unique position to see the effects that bullying can have on a student, and now, armed with policies that direct

her to be proactive in the face of bullying, she can do more about it.

She wrote “Bully Free” to a rap music beat and is hoping to record it at a recording studio, and then perhaps share it with other schools and students.

“I think it’s a great way to bring the message to the kids,” she said.

In the past, if Grenier saw bullying in a hallway, she would talk in private with the students involved. Under the new laws, she is encouraged to confront bullying behavior whenever she finds it, and approach the victim, allowing her to address it more directly and less secretively.

“We let kids know we have their back when it comes to bullying,” she said. “We also let kids know they should have each other’s back when it comes to bullying.”

Grenier said the state law and the Peabody anti-bullying policy codify procedures counselors should take if they find evidence of bullying or if it is reported to them.

“We investigate all reports,” she said.

Grenier also gets involved with parents whose children have been victims of bullies, or those whose children have exhibited behavior that has been seen as bullying. The issue of cyber-bullying has also taken center stage.

“We do talk about it, especially in grades 4 and 5 when kids are more likely to be involved in social media,” said Grenier.

When students see Grenier in different school settings and at school events, it makes it that much easier to approach her if they have a problem.

“The music can serve as a bridge with kids and parents,” she said. “It can help me do my job better.”



McCarthy school guidance counselor Karen Grenier with Anthony Pitterson. PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

Information on Karen Grenier’s music career is available at reverbnation.com/karengrenier or Kgrenier.com

“Bully Free”

We Will Not Bully!
No, we will never do it
And if we see it happen
We’ll help each other through it.
We won’t stand by and let it
happen at all
We will speak up now, we will
answer the call
(chorus)

If you want in
We won’t leave you out,
Everybody is a friend
It’s what we are about
It doesn’t matter your looks
Or the clothes that you wear
The shade of your skin
Or the color of your hair
(chorus)

I’ll take the pledge
I promise to care
And be kind to
everybody everywhere
And if I see someone
Hurting somebody else,
I’m gonna tell an adult
And get them some help
(chorus)

Chorus

I’ll stand up for you
You stand up for me
Together we can make
McCarthy Bully Free!
I’ll look out for you
You’ll look out for me
Together we can make
our world Bully Free!
Bully, free free free free
Bully, free free free free
Bully, free free free free
Bully, free free free...

Lyrics and music by Karen Grenier

AROUND PEABODY SCHOOLS



South School fifth-grade students took part in a biography wax museum project. The students researched a person in history and then dressed as that person. During the wax museum presentation, students answered questions and provided important biographical information about their characters. Shown from far left are, Lilia Avila as Abe Lincoln, Sydney Colbert as Betsy Ross and Trevor Smith as Mahatma Gandhi.



The **Burke School** celebrated Read Across America. Guest readers included: Mayor Ted Bettencourt, School Committee members Brandi Carpenter and Beverley Griffin-Dunne, Superintendent Joseph Mastrocola, School Safety Officer Richard Cochran, State Rep. Ted Speliotis, city councilors Tom Gould, Dave Gravel and Barry Sinewitz, U.S. Army Major Daniel Winschel, firefighter Capt. Ted Quinn, PTO President Tracey Jorgenson and Dave Gravel.

Center School plants seeds for future

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Students at the Center School are planting the seeds for their future among the radish, tomatoes, kale and lettuce in their new school garden.

The garden was the brainchild of local gardener Ray Stoei and Center School Principal Katherine St. Peter, both of whom enjoy gardening and understand the importance of exposing children to the experience.

“Children should learn how to grow their own organic fruits and vegetables,” said Stoei, who has gardened as a pastime for 40 years.

Noticing the vast front lawn on the school’s property, Stoei approached St. Peter with the idea and offered to volunteer his time. Northeast Nursery stepped up to donate soil, while Moynihan Lumber in Beverly provided a discount on the lumber to build the three 4x8 garden beds, which were installed last spring. Olsen Curtis Fence Co. in Salem donated posts for the fencing. The Center School PTO and St. Peter donated funds in 2012, supplying the seeds.

Recruiting more than a dozen interested students, Stoei formed an after-school Garden Club, which last year planted and harvested lettuce, radish, potatoes, sweet potatoes, string beans, eggplant, tomatoes, tomatillo, peas, Swiss chard, mint, cucumbers, carrots, garlic, onions and kale.

“The carrots and fresh kale were a big hit,” said Stoei. “A lot of students had never tried kale before, and the greatest gift is seeing a child taste something new, and enjoy it.”

This year, the club, which has 18 active members, has planted marigold seeds and lettuce to start. The Garden Club meets once a week from February through June and will begin meeting again in September. Stoei has also initiated a parent group to encourage more parental involvement and promote gardening as a family activity.

“It’s difficult to keep students involved without the



Center School Principal Katherine St. Peter and local gardener Ray Stoei gather with students from the Center School Garden Club. PHOTO: PAULA MULLER

parents, and the parents at this school have been just wonderful,” said Stoei.

Last summer, students and parents rotated shifts, each taking on a week to weed, water and harvest. Stoei said that commitment was essential to keeping the project going. Some students carried over what they learned through the club and planted gardens in their own yards.

“Some of the parents reported that their children tried many new vegetables and liked them, and they wouldn’t have done this if not for the Garden Club experience,” said St. Peter.

Students are also getting outside and learning life science skills that are part of the Next Generation Science Standards released this year.

“It is important for children to learn through hands-on experiences and see that science is a natural connection to not only the Core standards but a connection to their whole life,” said St. Peter. “Children can learn science

content naturally through gardening. An outdoor classroom is an exciting way to connect the learning of science to nature and the environment. The Garden Club experience can begin to conduct inquiry through children’s natural curiosity about living and non-living things found in the outdoors. This experience can also be linked to language arts in which students read, observe, classify, predict and write about growing food and flowers. We also hope to connect many students to the outdoors and nature as a place for personal exploration and appreciation.”

St. Peter is researching grant funding to support and expand this worthwhile school community project. Stoei, who is equally excited about the future of the project, will continue to volunteer his time and has enrolled in an online Master Gardener course through Oregon State University.

Rocha carries on family tradition

ROCHA: from page 12

“I love the team aspect of it. The boys and girls teams are just like one big family.”

The family celebrated together last fall when the Peabody High girls cross country team captured its first state championship since 1978, and Catarina was named Gatorade’s Massachusetts Cross Country Runner of the Year for the second straight year.

Joe Rocha said Catarina’s future on the track would be up to Providence women’s track coach Ray Treacy, but he wouldn’t be surprised if she made a natural progression to longer distances such as 5,000 or even 10,000 meters.

“She has the range to be successful at distances from 800 to 5,000 meters,” he said, noting that Catarina had also tied Lesley Welch’s school record in the 1,000 during the indoor season.

Don’t look now, but while Catarina is leaving, brother Marcelo Rocha – third in last fall’s Massachusetts State Middle School Cross Country Invitational – will be entering Peabody High as a freshman this fall, and brother Claudio will again be a member of the Higgins Middle School cross-country team.

Joe Rocha said no one in the family was disappointed when Catarina didn’t choose Boston College.

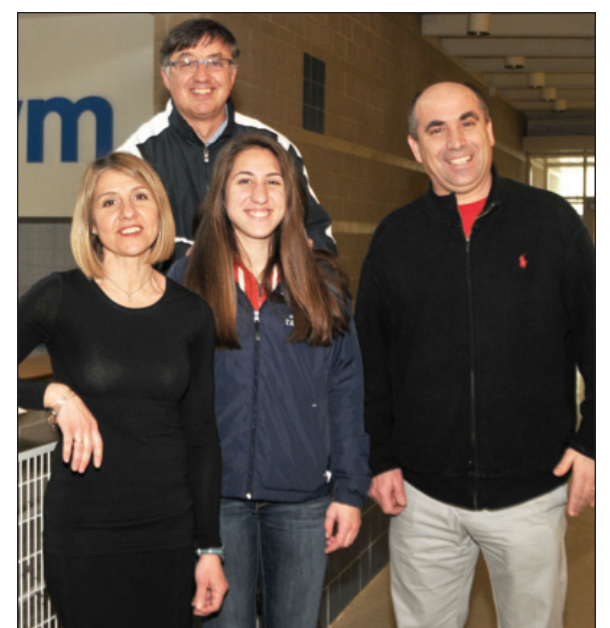
“Providence is a great fit for her,” he

said, “a good program with great tradition and academics.”

Catarina said the success of the Peabody High programs through the years has made it easy to recruit students who want to be part of the tradition.

“The athletes in the past have given us something to look up to,” she said. “The great coaches make it fun and great kids want to be part of it.”

“What I’m happiest about is that she’s a good person and student,” said Joe Rocha. “She’s very involved in the school and the community, humble about all her success and very team-oriented. As far as her running career goes, the best is yet to come.”



From left, Gina Rocha, Fernando Braz, Catarina Rocha and Joe Rocha

SPORTS

THE PEABODY EDUCATOR

RUNNING WITH THE ROCHAS

BY RICH FAHEY

While there's no question that Catarina Rocha is one of the finest female distance runners in Massachusetts high school history, there is a debate over whether she's the best runner in the history of her family.

Her father, Joe Rocha, believes she is. "She's finished second at the Foot Locker (National Cross Country Championships) and no one else in the family was better than top 15," he said. "Case closed."

Catarina, 18, won the Northeast Regional Cross Country Championship by 19 seconds in New York City last November before finishing second in San Diego in her third straight appearance in the national championships.

The Peabody High senior is headed to Providence College on a full athletic scholarship in the fall, but there is the business of an outdoor track season to continue to pile up records and accolades.

Catarina's father and coach, Joe Rocha, her mother, Gina (Braz) Rocha, a teacher at the Carroll School, and her uncle, Fernando Braz, the boys track coach at PVMHS, were all storied runners in their own right, and followed that up with equally storied collegiate careers. Joe Rocha, who went by Jose back then, competed for New Bedford High and both Fernando and Gina Braz ran for PVMHS.

Joe Rocha and Fernando Braz still rank 1-2 in the Boston College record book for 10,000 meters, and the former Gina Braz was a standout cross country runner for the Eagles.

Fernando Braz was 15th in the first Kinney Cross Country Championship in

1979; Joe Rocha was 15th in the 1982 race in Orlando and Gina was 21st in San Diego in 1984.

Catarina Rocha's most recent achievement was winning the 2-mile at the MIAA Div. 1 meet on May 27 with a time of 10:40.68.

Last winter, she ran a 4:49.14 in the mile at the All-State indoor meet, breaking her own meet record and winning by 50 meters – which made her the third-fastest high school female miler of the 2013 indoor season on regulation tracks not longer than 200 meters. It broke the school record set by Lisa Welch, was the fifth-fastest time in state history and earned her a sixth state title.

"I knew it was my last race of the season indoors so I let it all hang out," she said.

Eyebrows were raised when Catarina passed on the New England Championships or a chance to compete in the New Balance National Indoor Championships.

"The plan was always to make the indoor season low-key and have her take two weeks off before starting training for outdoors," said Joe Rocha. When you run three seasons like Catarina does, you need time to rest and recover."

Joe Rocha said Catarina's current training regimen is lighter than many other standout runners, and he expects that to serve her well down the line as she matures and gets stronger.

Catarina was also a standout soccer player, but she gave it up after her freshman season. Her first love as a runner is cross country, where she is also coached by her father.

"I miss soccer because I played it so long, but I liked running better and I especially enjoy cross country," she said.

Catarina Rocha has enhanced her family's legacy in the Peabody High track program.

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