



A supplement from the ...

# Palm Springs Unified School District

Serving Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage & Thousand Palms – December/January 2009-10

## Two District Students On International Debate Team

### Team Places Third at Competition in Qatar

Two Palm Springs Unified School District students from a 15-member United States team competed at the recent Mini World Schools Debate Championship (WSDC) in Doha, Qatar.

The U.S. team, which included Desert Hot Springs High sophomore Karley Henderson and Palm Springs High junior Vanessa Wilcox, finished third in the debate competition with a 4 and 1 record, losing only to the number two team from New Zealand. Eleven countries participated including: Qatar, China, New Zealand, Chile (taking first place), Oman, UAE, Sudan, Uganda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lebanon. The program is funded by the Qatar Foundation.

Along with the debate competition, the team also participated in

the United Nations Global Forum VI, the two-day opening for a United National conference on corruption. Thirty students from six continents developed solutions to achieve cultural integrity and reform. UN leaders commented that every UN conference should have a student contingent. Students got to ask questions of US Attorney General Eric Holder and Qatar Attorney General Dr. Ali Bin Fetais Al-Marri.

In addition to Henderson and Wilcox, the U.S. team included two students from Harvard-Westlake High School in Los Angeles and one student from Upland High School. The team was accompanied by Greg Paulk, coach for the Desert Springs Middle School debate team and



PSUSD students **Vanessa Wilcox** (second from left) and **Karley Henderson** (far right) with other members of award-winning U.S. debate team.

coach, trainer, and judge at Mini-WSDC. "For our kids to have such an outstanding performance in their first international competition is phenomenal," said Paulk. "We are all extremely proud of their achievements."

The students also participated in the Qatar Academy, a four-day debate training workshop conducted by teachers and coaches from the 11 participating nations.

"My first trip to another country was amazing," said Henderson. "Every day there was an experience I will never forget. The people who went were the friendliest and most talented people I have ever met. The hospitality of the whole city was unimaginable."

"Team USA connected with every team, from Lebanon—forming our own Lebanon-America-Alliance—to Sudan, New Zealand, Uganda and Qatar," said Wilcox. "We all learned that despite what our political leaders represent, our own understandings were far simpler and far better and that we all love Facebook."

The U.S. international debate team was formed by the Claremont-McKenna Debate League, who recruited nation-wide and chose 15 students. Kelley Bieringer, former James Workman MS teacher and debate coach, is program manager for Qatar Debate in Qatar.

**We all learned that despite what our political leaders represent, our own understandings were far simpler and far better... Vanessa Wilcox, junior, PS High.**

## Had to Meet Rigorous Standards of Excellence Five PSUSD Teachers Achieve Certification by National Board

Five Palm Springs Unified School District elementary teachers have achieved National Board Certification

Julius Corsini Elementary teachers Denise Enberg, Kristin Silvey and Barry Wissman, Della S, Lindley Elementary teacher Tammy Riddle and Agua Caliente Elementary teacher Dan Carroll were all successful in their NBCT efforts and have been awarded national board certification.

Last year, five Corsini teachers achieved national board certification. In the past two years, a total of 18 Corsini teachers attempted full boards. Those teachers who have not yet passed are within a few points and could certify by next fall.

National Board Certification is considered the highest certification of excellence a teacher can receive. It is based on five core propositions—Teachers: are committed to students and learning; know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students; are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning; think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and are members of learning communities

The process for becoming an NBPTS teacher takes over 200 hours to complete. Teachers must create a portfolio with videotaped lessons and submit four portfolio entries with three of them classroom-based with examples of student work. The fourth focuses on accomplishments outside the classroom and how they impact student learning. Applicants must also demonstrate content knowledge in response to six exercises developed for the chosen certificate area.

Eligible teachers must teach for at least three years. However, since the process is relevant for all instruction, the National Board has a program called "Take One!," which allows teachers with fewer than three years of experience to take one of the portfolio entries that can be banked for full board certification once they become eligible.

The passing rate for board certification is about 50 percent. It takes a majority of teachers three years to complete the process.

This year a total of 23 PSUSD elementary teachers attempted full board certification, and another 24 teachers attempted the "Take One!"

## State Honors PSUSD Staffers

Palm Springs High School Science Department Chairperson Teresa Haga and Principal Ricky Wright were selected as Outstanding Educational Leaders by Region 10 of the California League of High Schools (CLHS).

Principal Wright and Haga, who teaches physics and earth science and is Communications Liaison for Small Learning Communities at Palm Springs High, were honored at an awards banquet at the Riverside Marriott earlier this month.

Haga and Wright were the only Coachella Valley educators to be named among the 17 CLHS Region 10 honorees.

# District



**WELCOMING NEW 'EXPLORERS:'** Palm Springs Unified School District dedicated the new Cabot Yerxa Elementary School in Desert Hot Springs at the end of October. The school opened at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. All of the Desert Hot Springs City Council members attended the ribbon-cutting along with many other business, civic and community organization representatives. Pictured with them are Mayor Yvonne Parks, holding scissors, and immediately right of her, PSUSD Board member Shari Stewart, Supt. of Schools Dr. Lorri McCune and Cabot Yerxa principal Mike Grein.

**LETTERS, GIFTS TO TROOPS:** The Family YMCA of the Desert's after school program participants at Raymond Cree Middle School recently shared gifts and read the letters they prepared for American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan at a special "Patriotism Ceremony." The students spent two weeks on the project as a way to demonstrate appreciation to and support of our American soldiers. After the ceremony, the letters and gifts were packaged and sent overseas. Pictured above, students read their letters to their peers and other ceremony guests.



**JROTC CADETS CELEBRATE CORPS BIRTHDAY:** Sixty-five Marine cadets from Desert Hot Springs High's JROTC attended the recent annual Marine Corps Birthday Luncheon at the Miracle Springs Spa Resort in Desert Hot Springs. Community representatives and retired Marines sponsored the students attendance. Pictured, Lt. Col Carl Lewke, center and Master Sgt. Mark Coates serve cake to the youngest and oldest Marine.



**HOMECOMING PARADES SHOW OFF SCHOOL PRIDE:** It was a "Haunted Halloween" at this year's Cathedral City High School Homecoming Parade. Above left, the class of 2010 displays its "It's Alive" float. A week later Palm Springs High School showed its school spirit with its board game theme Homecoming Parade. At right, the senior float depicts the game of Monopoly.



**PALM SPRINGS HS WINS 'GOT MILK?' CHALLENGE:** PSUSD along with "Got Milk?" challenged high school students at Palm Springs, Desert Hot Springs and Cathedral High Schools to start their day off

right with a nutritious breakfast with milk for better academic performance. Each school's Associated Student Body promoted free breakfast during the three-week contest. "Got Milk?" gave \$2,500 in prize money. Palm Springs High won first and \$1,500 by increasing participation by 257 percent over the same period last year. DHS took second place (\$500) with an increase of 204 percent, and CCHS took third (\$500) with 161 percent. Pictured above Director of Food Services Wanda Grant presents first place check to Palm Springs High ASB President Jessica Rees, left, and Vice President Angelica Periera.

**WALK TO SCHOOL WEEK:** Physical Education teacher Jody Diaz commemorated International Walk to School Week at the five elementary schools at which she teaches by inviting students, staff and community members from Rio Vista, Vista del Monte, Cielo Vista, Della Lindley and Katherine Finchy Elementary Schools to meet at a designated location and walk as a group to school. The event seeks to raise awareness of a variety of issues, including physical fitness; teaching safe walking skills to children; awareness of how walkable a community can be; concern for the environment; and reduction of traffic congestion, pollution and speed near schools. At left, Diaz, front center, leads a group from the Palm Springs Unified School District office to Katherine Finchy along with Finchy teacher Lori Gamble, front right.



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James Novak, Assistant Superintendent

This Palm Springs Unified School District newsletter is published bimonthly by the Palm Springs Unified School District, 980 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 101, Palm Springs, CA 92262. Phone: 760-416-6010 • Email: jboiko@psusd.net

# Digest

**CHAMBER HONORS TEACHERS:** The Cathedral City Chamber of Commerce recently honored the Teachers of the Year from Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage and Thousand Palms with their annual "Red Apple Awards" at a breakfast at the Doral Resort. Pictured are, seated from left, Mary Jo Mosby, Mount San Jacinto High; Christi Swafford, Della S. Lindley Elementary; Cindy Simon, Sunny Sands Elementary; Melissa Forgacs, Nellie N. Coffman Middle; Jessica Huettner, Rancho Mirage Elementary; and Greg Whitmore, Cathedral City High. Standing, from left, Jorge Jimenez, James Workman Middle; Jessica Arduini, Cathedral City Elementary principal, standing in for recipient Pete Johnson; Jennifer Leather, Landau Elementary; Emcee Jenifer Daniels Xanders; Kathleen Yearwood, Rio Vista Elementary; and Bruce Gillen, branch manager of Altura Credit Union in Rancho Mirage, which sponsored the breakfast. Missing from photo is Agua Caliente Elementary honoree Amanda Gonzales.



**ROTARY CLUBS PRESENT DICTIONARIES TO THIRD GRADERS:** The Rotary Clubs of Cathedral City, Palm Springs and Rancho Mirage recently presented dictionaries to third grade students in the cities that the clubs serve. The Cathedral City Rotary Club presented dictionaries to students to all Cathedral City third graders. Sunny Sands students received their dictionaries from the Rotarians, and principals from the other schools received the dictionaries for their third graders. Pictured immediately below, from left, Sunny Sands Principal Karen Cornett; Rotarians Laura Ahmed, Tee Ahmed, Carol Pipitone and Earl Moss; Supt. of Schools Dr. Lorri McCune; Board of Education member Richard Clapp; Rio Vista Principal Mike Long; Agua Caliente Principal Lucy Medina; and Sunny Sands Assistant Principal Pam Horton. Below right, the Palm Springs Sun-Up Rotary Club presented dictionaries to Vista Del Monte Elementary School. Pictured from left, Rotarians Kristin Bloomer, Christine Jeffers and Kevin Taylor; Principal Joe Scudder; and Rotarians Kira Klatchko, Giller Boyd. The Rancho Mirage Rotary Club presented dictionaries to Rancho Mirage and Thousand Palms students, and the new Palm Springs Evening Rotary gave dictionaries to third graders at Katherine Finchy Elementary. At bottom left, members of the Palm Springs Noon Club gave dictionaries to, Cahuilla Elementary and will be giving dictionaries to Cielo Vista third graders as well. Pictured with the Rotarians are Principal Denise Ellis, left, and Assistant Supt. of Pupil Personnel Services Dr. Craig Borba, second from right.

**CREE MURAL LAUNCHES 'ARTISTS IN RESIDENCY' PROGRAM:** A new Raymond Cree Middle School mural which pays tribute to the school's renowned architect Donald Wexler (shown signing the mural above with PSUSD Visual and Performing Arts Specialist Louisa Castrodale), opened the school's new "artist-in-residency" program. The mural also depicts the school's namesake and was developed in cooperation with the Palm Springs Historical Society and created by Castrodale, artists Eduardo Valadez and Aaron Hansen and 12 Cree students.



**of Education**  
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Clerk

andron Meredy Shoenberger

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District report to the community  
Palm Springs Unified School District.  
Palm Springs, CA 92262 • Editor: Joan L. Boiko  
@psusd.us • Website: www.psusd.us



# New Teaching Approach Yields Positive Results

In the past three years, Palm Springs High School has seen an increase in student attendance and state test scores and a decrease in student discipline referrals and failure rates.

One reason for these successes is the launch of the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program, which has been an integral part of the daily operation of the school since the fall of 2007.

SLCs allow a group of teachers from core subject areas the opportunity to share approximately 200 students in a group called a "house."

The teachers meet on a regular basis—typically during their common planning period—to discuss students' progress and curriculum.

The philosophical focus of SLCs is to promote supportive relationships between the teachers and their students, who often feel lost and disconnected in a larger, impersonal environment.

When one teacher speaks to a parent, it is often to convey information about the student's behavior and academic progress in all of the classes within the house. The houses held parent/teacher conference nights as well as individual student/parent/teacher conferences with the goal of improving students' academic success.

Teachers also work together to plan interdisciplinary projects which to date have included the creation of science-concept storyboards to read to elementary students and



Palm Springs High students share their science concept storyboards with elementary students in a new teaching environment called "Smaller Learning Communities."

the Personal Responsibility and Ethics (PRE) Faire, which showcased student work and allowed students the opportunity to interact with several community members.

Many of the cross-curricular projects focus on ensuring that students feel a connection to the school and act as reward for their academic achievement.

There are currently three freshman houses, two sophomore houses and three academies in which students from all grades participate. The focus of the academies is to offer enrichment activities to the students who are interested in a career pathway in business, health, or the arts. To learn more about the SLCs, visit the website at [www.pshsslc.info](http://www.pshsslc.info).

## Message from the Superintendent

# Staying Focused Through Budgetary Challenges

It seems like every time we hear a glimmer of hope that the economy is improving (i.e.: boost in new home sales), the next day we hear that the overall state fiscal crisis will continue for several more years!

Given the dismal outlook and lack of definitive answers regarding future budget cuts, Palm Springs Unified School District is stretching every dollar, making only essential purchases and maximizing every resource available. Expenditures are carefully scrutinized. We are being as creative as possible in doing more with fewer resources and maintaining as many jobs as possible.

As an example, our student enrollment at the elementary level is below projections at several schools this year which necessitated combining several classes. As a Program Improvement (PI) district with a District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) plan, we focus on providing intervention services for students who are need more as-

sistance to master core standards. We used the teaching positions available by combining smaller classes to add intervention specialists at each of our Program Improvement schools. We received reports from our site administrators that this support has had a positive impact on those students.

There is a strong possibility that although education has taken much more than its fair share of state budget cuts, we may indeed be faced with more mid-year cuts next month. Palm Springs Unified received nearly \$25 million in budget cuts from the state over the past two years. We cut every department by about 10 percent, offered an early retirement incentive last year, closed vacant positions, cut manage-



ment positions and laid-off classified and certificated staff members. Even without additional mid-year cuts, we still must reduce our budget by about \$4 million to manage the budget reductions currently in place. Whatever additional cuts come either in January and/or in next year's budget will increase this challenge

What some of our local residents may not realize is that the budget situation is not a result of actions by our Board of Education members or administrators. Our local representatives in Sacramento - our senators, assembly people and the Governor, determine state funding to local districts. What is incomprehensible to those of us in education is how our lawmakers continue to decimate funding to local school districts. Schools have taken a much larger proportion of the cuts than most other state programs. For example, over the past four years, budget allocations to the state Department of

Corrections increased by about 42 percent, while the education budget was reduced below the funding level in 2004-5 (about 1 percent). What are our state's priorities?

Our assistant superintendent of business services, Jim Novak, developed an exceptional presentation that explains our current budget situation, the projections at this time and a comparison of allocations of the state's largest departments. The presentation may be accessed on the home page of our website at [www.psusd.us](http://www.psusd.us).

As we continue to weather this most difficult storm, we maintain our focus on academic achievement for each of our more than 24,000 students. Thank you for your continued support.

Lorri S. McCune, Ed. D.  
Superintendent of Schools