

A supplement from the . . .



Palm Springs Unified School District

Serving Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage & Thousand Palms — Spring 2009

Construction Moves Ahead Bond Funds Restricted To Spending on Capital Projects

While the current budget crisis across the state necessitated school districts, including Palm Springs Unified, to freeze non-essential spending and plan for massive cuts in both the current year budget and next year's budget, capital improvement projects in the District are moving forward as scheduled.

Monies from bond measures, as well as redevelopment funds the District receives, may only be spent on facilities projects. These funds cannot be put towards any other expenses related to programs, services or materials.

The nine-member Palm Springs Unified School District's Citizens' Oversight Committee (COC), formed prior to the start of any of the projects slated under the 2004 Measure T bond, reviews all expenditures of the \$122 million Measure T and \$516 million Measure E in order to ensure that funds are being spent as specified in the ballot measures.

The COC has published an annual report outlining construction projects under way and planned as part of the two bond measures passed by District voters in 2004 and 2008. The annual report is available by accessing the COC link on the home page of the District website at www.psusd.us. Hard copies are also available at all District school sites, city halls, libraries and chambers of commerce as well as at the District Office at 980 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs.

Current projects under way include the new Cabot Yerxa Elementary School in Desert Hot Springs, which will open for the 2009-10 school year. The school, located at 67067 Desert View Drive, was funded through the 2004 Measure T bond and will house 750 students and ease overcrowding at Julius Corsini and Bubbling Wells elementary schools.

The District's fifth middle school, to be located at the corner of Sonora Drive and Avenida Jalisco in Desert Hot Springs, received approval from the Division of State Architect's office last month. An integral part of the Measure T bond measure, the school is expected to break ground in April and open for the 2010-11 school year. The new middle school will help ease overcrowding at Desert Springs Middle School, which currently houses over 1,700 students.



Cabot Yerxa Elementary construction proceeding as scheduled.

An additional elementary school, to be located on Avenida Jalisco in Desert Hot Springs, adjacent to the new middle school, is currently in the design stages. The school, funded through the Measure T bond, is estimated to be completed during the 2010-11 school year.

The District's fourth comprehensive high school, located north of Ramon and east of DaVall Roads in Rancho Mirage, is slated to begin construction as soon as a legal challenge by nearby residents has been decided. The high school, funded by Measure E, will include 100 classrooms, performing arts center and culinary arts buildings and will help ease overcrowding at nearby Cathedral City High School, which now houses nearly 3,000 students.

The District Office in Palm Springs is being renovated to accommodate much-needed training and meeting space. The project was approved by the City of Palm Springs in January. The Benefits/Risk Management offices will move to the first floor next to the Human Resources Department, and the Purchasing Department (now located at the Alejo Road maintenance and operations center) will move into the first floor currently occupied by Educational Services. Educational Services will move to the renovated second floor of the adjacent building formerly occupied by the Internal Revenue Service. The project is funded through redevelopment monies.

Renovations and modernizations are also in various stages of planning and design at sites throughout the District.

For more information on any District projects, call Executive Director of Facilities Planning Julie Arthur at 416-6117.

Citizens' Oversight Committee ensures money spent as approved by voters

Rancho Mirage, Sunny Sands Two PSUSD Schools Receive 'No Child' Academic Awards

Rancho Mirage and Sunny Sands Elementary Schools are among just 12 schools in Riverside County to receive the state Title I Academic Achievement Award for 2008. The awards will be presented to Rancho Mirage Principal Marsha Boring and Sunny Sands Principal Karen Cornett, at the state Title I conference in Anaheim in April.



O'Connell

Title I is part of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 designed to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. The Title I Academic Achievement Awards Program recognizes schools that are demonstrating success in ensuring all students are making significant progress toward proficiency on California's academic content standards. These standards define the knowledge, concepts, and skills students are expected to acquire at each grade level. In addition, the awardees provide support and serve as models for other schools, especially other Title I schools that have failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years and are designated for Program Improvement.

"These schools deserve high praise for improving student achievement," said State Supt. of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell of the 200 schools statewide that met the criteria for the honor from the more than 6,000 Title I schools in the state.

"They have addressed barriers to student success and were able to create a school environment conducive to learning," he said. "I congratulate the teachers, staff, paraprofessionals, parents, and students who all worked hard this past year to improve. I hold these schools up as models for their success in ensuring that all students without regard to race, economic status, or physical or mental challenges are given the kind of education that allows them to achieve to their fullest potential."

Title I AAA schools must have demonstrated the achievement level of twice the school-wide Academic Performance Index (API) growth target and twice the API growth target for the socio-economically disadvantaged subgroup for two consecutive years. The schools must also have attained or surpassed the 2008 API growth median score of 779 for elementary schools. Rancho Mirage's API was 839 this year, and Sunny Sands had an API of 811.

English Learners Making Strides

The most recent results of state standardized exams indicate that the District's English Learners (ELs) are making substantial progress toward proficiency in English.

The percentage of ELs attaining proficiency (Early Advanced or Advanced) on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) rose from 29.7 percent in 2006-07 to 35.8 percent in 2007-08, well above the federal target of 30.6 percent. Scores were released last month.

"There has been a great amount of growth from last year to this year, and we are significantly above the federal indicator," said Dr. Mike Swize, the District's director of English Learners.

Another goal of Palm Springs Unified is that all ELs progress at least one level on the CELDT exam each year. With a federal target of 51.6 percent for 2007-08, a total of 54.8 percent of PSUSD's ELs made annual progress on the exam, up from 51 percent in 2006-07.

"Our ELs are learning English more rapidly than in the past," Swize said.

The percentage of students meeting the District's criteria to be reclassified from EL to Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP) has also increased this year and is above the percentage for both the county and state. The percentage of reclassified students for the District was 10 percent for 2007-08 compared with 6.9 percent in Riverside County and 9.2 percent statewide.

"We are reclassifying students successfully," said Swize. "Our Palm Springs Unified English Learners are learning English and meeting rigorous standards. Their scores significantly increased over last year."

The CELDT data helps principals and teachers respond to the needs of the ELs. Students who did not progress at least one level toward proficiency are placed in interventions in order to help them to be successful on the spring STAR tests and/or the California High School Exit Exam.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Lorri McCune praised Swize for the extensive training teachers are receiving in EL instruction including the "Thinking Maps" process, which teaches students through graphic organizers to help them learn more easily.

"Dr. Swize's training has been excellent and carries over into data monitoring," McCune said. "Teachers are focused, looking at student data and how to improve their CELDT levels and student achievement."



Swize

District Names Top Staffers



Staff Members of the Year, from left, Jim Novak, Mike Wong, Karen Cornett, Theresa O'Dell and Victoria Nunz

Palm Springs Unified has named five top staff members of the year, and two are finalists for county honors in their respective job classifications.

Sunny Sands Elementary School Principal Karen Cornett was chosen as the district's Principal of the Year. She began her teaching career at St. Theresa Catholic School in Palm Springs before becoming a teacher at Agua Caliente Elementary in 1974. Cornett also taught

at Katherine Finchy Elementary and served as Cielo Vista Elementary's site coordinator/reading teacher before serving as assistant principal at Landau Elementary for two years. She has been the principal at Sunny Sands since 1993.

Mike Wong, coordinator of student assistance programs, was chosen as Certificated Administrator of the Year. Wong has been in the field of education for 29 years, beginning as a special education teacher for the Riverside County Office of Education. He joined Palm Springs Unified in 1984 and has served as an elementary teacher and elementary and middle school counselor. Wong became supervisor of student assistance programs in 1999 and was named coordinator of the department in 2007.

Jim Novak, assistant superintendent of business services, was named Classified Administrator of the Year and is a finalist for the county honor in that category. With 11 years in the field of education, Novak joined Palm Springs Unified in 2004 after serving as executive director of business and operations for the Chelsea School District in Michigan for four years and then assistant superintendent of business services for South San Francisco Unified School District for three years.

Theresa O'Dell, senior administrative assistant for Innovation, Resources and Educational Development, was named Confidential Staff Member of the Year and is a finalist for county honors. O'Dell has spent 28 years in education. From 1981 until 2007, she served as an administrative manager and managing editor for secondary and post-secondary textbooks for an educational publishing company. She joined Palm Springs Unified in her current post in 2007.

Victoria Nunz, Help Desk technician, was chosen as the Classified Staff Member of the Year. Nunz began her career in education as a bilingual instructional aide for two years and then served as a bilingual clerk for Early Childhood Education for five years. In 2005, Nunz joined the Educational Technology and Information Services department as Help Desk Technician.

The employees of the year were chosen by a committee of last year's district winners from nominations submitted by district staff members. County winners will be announced later this month and all honorees will be recognized at a luncheon in Riverside in May.

INSIDE

Students Get Cultural Lesson

And become ambassadors for the Palm Springs area in the process.....page 2

Superintendent View

McCune says current budget crisis worst she has seen in her entire career.....page 2

District Digest

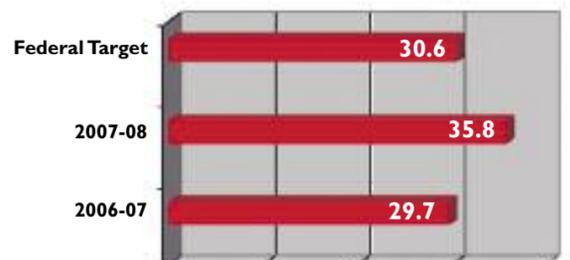
A potpourri of activities and events from schools throughout the District.....page 3

'Diamonds in the Rough'

A special program for early identification of tomorrow's leaders.....page 4

PSUSD English Learners Test Results

(Percent of EL students proficient in English)



Students Showcase Valley at Asian Expo

A large contingent of Palm Springs High School students, led by 41 members of the school's International Business Club, helped showcase the city and their school's talent pool at the recent 28th Annual Asian American Expo in Pomona.

While Business Club members passed out local business promotional materials, showed videos to promote the Palm Springs tourism industry and conducted raffle drawings for prizes donated by local businesses, more than 100 other Palm Springs High students entertained attendees.

The opening ceremonies for the January 16-18 Expo featured the Palm

Springs Spirit of the Sands Marching Band and visual corp along with the Air Force Junior ROTC color guard. Supt. of Schools Dr. Lorri McCune and Palm Springs High Principal Ricky Wright were among the dignitaries who cut the ribbon to begin the Expo, which recognizes food, fun, family and financial prosperity in the Southern California Asian community.

Other performances throughout the 2-day event included the Palm Springs High Cheerleading Team and Dance Team.

"The event was an amalgamation of cultures and an unforgettable experience," noted Jaynie Larson, a Palm Springs High English teacher and co-advisor of the International Business Club.

"The Asian American Expo is a great experience," said Business Club member George Mitchell. "It lets you experience all of the different cultures of Asia. My favorite part of the fair was the opening ceremony, where we watched the lion dance. Some people had the chance to pet its head for good luck. After that, our band played and all of the dignitaries released balloons into the sky. If I get the chance, I hope to go again next year."

"The Asian American Expo was a very exciting experience for me," said Business Club member Armi Victoria Descalzo. "I think that the Expo was a great way for people to learn about the Asian American culture. My friends and I walked around having fun taking silly pictures and looking at the array of things to buy, especially the Asian Dramas. We watched the Shaolin Monks perform, and I thought that they were amazing. The Laker Girls were also there, and we got to get their autographs and saw them perform as well. I really enjoyed attending the Expo, especially learning about Asian American culture because my Great grandfather is Chinese, and I never got to meet him or my grandfather. I cannot wait for the next Asian American Expo, because I am definitely going next year and bringing extra cash to buy Asian Dramas!"



The contingency from Palm Springs High was nearly 150 strong including International Business Club members along with members of the JROTC, marching band, visual corps and dance and cheer teams.

New Principal Is Named for Della Lindley

Dr. Simone Kovats has been named principal of Della S. Lindley Elementary in Thousand Palms, effective next month.



Kovats

Kovats, who most recently served as a principal in the Anaheim City School District, will replace Mike Grein, who has been named principal of the new Cabot Yerxa Elementary School in Desert Hot Springs, set to open in the fall.

Kovats began her teaching career in the Anaheim and Inglewood Unified School Districts before serving as a resource teacher and literacy coach in Anaheim City School District and then a vice principal and then principal since 2005.

CCHS Band Director Gets National Recognition



Whitmore

Cathedral City High School Director of Bands Gregory X. Whitmore has been selected by *School Band and Orchestra Magazine* to represent the state Of California in the publication's 11th annual "50 Directors Who Make A Difference" edition.

The magazine selects one band or orchestra director from each of the 50 states whose work in the field of music education is exemplary and sets a standard for their peers nationally. Each selected director will be featured in the SBO Edition via a question and answer interview.

School Band and Orchestra Magazine is a national monthly music education publication that features the newest trends in music education, as well as offer useful information and features for music educators.

The entire "50 Directors Who Make A Difference" article can be viewed at sbomagazine.com.

Cathedral City High Students Host Muscular Dystrophy Spokesman

Darius Weems' brother, Mario, asked his friend, Logan Smalley, to "watch over" his brother.

That was in 1999, just before Mario died at the age of 19 from Duchene Muscular Dystrophy (DMD), the same disease that also struck Darius and made it necessary for him to move to mobility by wheelchair, and the same disease that also claimed his uncle's life.

Logan decided that the best way to help his friend Darius was to "go west" and began a six-month campaign to raise the funds to help Darius leave his hometown of Athens, Georgia, for the first time in his life, and see the world that Mario never got to see.

Darius, Logan and some friends visited with Cathedral City High School's Health and Environmental Academy of Learning (HEAL) last month to share Darius' story, raise awareness of DMD and solicit the assistance of the students to help them reach their goal of raising \$17 million for DMD research by Darius' 20th birthday in September.

business teacher, we know that globalization is key for success for the next generation. For them, it is not a choice but a necessity to understand other cultures. Our Principal, Ricky Wright, has made it very clear from the beginning that he wants our students to be exposed to different cultures. Being able to see, taste, smell, listen, and touch the Chinese culture is one of the best business education experiences that we can offer to them. As a first generation immigrant, I see so many interests and stereotypes regarding Chinese culture. It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to explore these interests and stereotypes with my students."



Weems

They are raising money through the sale of a DVD called "Darius Goes West," about Weems' travels to increase awareness of DMD.

"We talked about the movie and Darius in English class," said HEAL Academy member Sophomore Brenda Valdez, who is considering a career in gynecology and obstetrics or pediatrics.

"It's amazing what he went through to get his message out. We're not fully aware of how difficult it is for people with disabilities. The video showed how some people don't take their needs into account."

The DVDs sell for \$20 each with \$17 going directly to DMD research and the other \$3 going to expenses for the road trips. To purchase a DVD or learn more about DMD or Darius Weems, visit www.dariusgoeswest.com.

Message from the Superintendent

Budget Cuts Versus Student Achievement

No doubt practically every single Californian is aware of and has been affected in some way by the cataclysmic state of our economy. As of press time, no budget has been approved, and the \$42 billion deficit (in a budget that is under \$100 billion in total) climbs each and every day. Businesses are being forced to close their doors, homes have been foreclosed upon, thousands of people have lost their jobs, state workers have been forced to take extra time off without pay, the state is not making payments to government agencies, tax refunds have been delayed and services have been cut.

This is most definitely the worst economic situation I've seen in my more than 30 years in education and may well be the worst financial crisis this state has ever seen. Those of us in the business of educating our children are not sleeping well these days as we wrestle with what to do and how to do it while still remaining focused on our mission of academic achievement for each and every one of our students.

Here's what we know:

Cuts in education will be severe both for the current budget year, next year and most likely the subsequent two or three years. The projection is that we will have to make \$7 to \$8 million in cuts for the 2008-09 year and another \$10 million for the 2009-10 school year.

Creating a balanced budget will not be an easy task. We believe we may be permitted to use carryover funds in some of our categorical budgets (funds designated for specific programs) to make up the reductions for this school year. Because PSUSD has a tradition of being fiscally conservative, we do not yet have a cash flow issue. We have adequate reserves to take us through the next few months even without state payments. This conservative budgeting made it possible for our District to avoid issuing staff layoff notices last year, while many other Districts across

the state were forced to issue notices and some forced to implement layoffs.

A few months ago, as soon as we learned how dire the situation was becoming, we froze all non-essential spending throughout the District - no major equipment purchases, no hiring of non-essential personnel, no conferences or travel that is not absolutely necessary, etc.

We are in the process of reviewing, evaluating and prioritizing all programs and services in an effort to begin the process of determining where we can make cuts that will have the least impact on our delivery of quality education for our children.

Contrary to popular belief, the state lottery only makes up about 1.5 percent of our budget, and those funds are partially restructured by the legislature as to how they can be spent. While those funds are most definitely needed, the lottery money is not the panacea many think it is.

The three school districts in the Coachella Valley are the largest employers in the desert. A total of 88 percent of our general fund budget of \$200 million goes to salaries and benefits for employees. Mass layoffs would not only affect the delivery of our programs and services but also the overall economic situation in our area. People without jobs lose their homes and can't contribute positively to the economic health of our community. Our District operates with a very minimal ratio of administrators to staff, so saying that we should "cut from the top" is not something that would result in a substantial amount of savings. The same goes for saying that we should cut "away from the classroom." When you are running a



\$200 million a year business, you have to have the support people to run that operation. Every single one of our staff members has an integral role in the organization. Reducing positions on top of previous cuts would not allow for optimum efficiency.

Our Palm Springs Unified staff is committed to our children and will do everything humanly possible to keep doing what is best for them. Our mission and goals remain the same, and every decision made will be made with that in mind.

Here's what we don't know:

Governor Schwarzenegger's current proposal is a mixture of spending reductions and revenue-producing measures (such as increased sales tax, increase on vehicle licensing fees, alcohol and service taxes, etc.) With education being about 40 percent of the state's overall budget, there is no doubt the cuts will be deep. Currently, much of our funding comes in the way of categorical programs, which means we are restricted on spending those funds on the programs for which those funds were allocated. The Governor is proposing that Districts be given flexibility on categorical funds, which would mean that while we would be receive a significant reduction in funding, we would be able to spend the money in the areas we deem necessary. This flexibility is crucial to local school districts, but it is an uphill battle being fought with some legislators who want to retain control of how the funds are spent.

One of the largest categorical program areas is class size reduction, which keeps class sizes at 20 students at first, second and third grades. Currently, if any classroom averages more than 20 students, we do not receive funding for that class. While we all are in favor of having class sizes as small as possible, in the economic crisis we are in, it is not practical to try to maintain these class sizes, especially when teachers' jobs are on the line. The California Teachers Association, one of the most powerful unions in the state, and the Parent

Teacher Association are pushing extremely hard for districts not to have flexibility in this program. The irony of this is that if districts are given flexibility to add just a couple of students per classroom, there would be a substantial savings in expenditures, while the student impact would be minimal. If there is no flexibility provided, many districts will be faced with the decision of eliminating class size reduction in its entirety, which could mean class sizes substantially higher in order to make up the funding loss.

While our goal is to not lay off any staff members, the reality is that without an approved budget and a legislative requirement that we notify teachers of the possibility of a layoff by March 15 each year for the following school year, layoff notices are a strong possibility this year.

I so wish I could provide budget news that is more positive, but, unfortunately the entire nation is in economic crisis, and the state of California is one of the state's in the worst situation in the country. I want to assure our staff, students, parents and community members that we are committed to weathering this devastating storm with a commitment to doing everything we possibly can to minimize the impact on programs, services and livelihoods while maintaining the rigor, high expectations and quality instruction our students deserve.

Please watch our website, www.psusd.us, for updates on the budget, and if you have any suggestions, feedback or questions, feel free to e-mail info@psusd.us. Thank you for your continued support as we move forward and forge ahead with the best interests of our students in mind and heart.

Lorri S. McCune

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

District Digest



TAMALES AND CLASSWORK:

Students and parents from Agua Caliente Elementary School recently had the opportunity to see what their children are currently learning at the school's festival, which also featured the opportunity for parents to enter their best tamale recipe for gift cards donated by local businesses. The judges, comprised of district administrators, teachers and a Board of Education member, tasted a wide variety of chicken, pork, beef and cheese tamales before determining which were the best submissions in each category. Cristy Kokoszka, leaning over, and Sharon Hadly showing lesson on telling time.



STUDENTS HONOR TROOPS:

Officers of the Cahuilla Elementary School Interact Club, sponsored by the Palm Springs noon Rotary, recently visited the Club's weekly meeting then took holiday cards, a banner and gifts to the USO room at the Palm Springs Airport for servicemen and women passing through. Pictured (l-r) are President Alexandra Mazmanian, Vice President JoAna Adams, Recording Secretary Hannah Wright, Corresponding Secretary Chelsie Gillespie and Treasurer Talon Gillespie.



ART DAY BENEFITS UGANDAN CHILDREN:

About 150 Nellie N. Coffman Middle School each created art in various media during the school's recent "Art Day," with the goal of raising \$1,200 by selling it at the Palm Springs Desert Museum to fund

a classroom floor for a school in Uganda. Spearheaded by teacher Kristin Damberger, whose sister is a Peace Corps volunteer in Uganda, the project was undertaken by several schools in the country with the goal of replacing all of the dirt floors in the school. Local artists volunteered their time to mentor the NNC students as they created their artwork. Pictured above, Gerry High, local artist and owner of the Gerry High Gallery in Cathedral City works with 8th grade student artists on acrylic paintings.

STUDENT ARTISTS FORGE AHEAD ON MURALS:

Desert Hot Springs Alternative Center students recently created one of the newest murals in the District (right), depicting the school's mascot, the Toltec India, surrounded by the four mottos of the school. This brings the total number of District murals to 34, with more planned.



SAM'S CLUB NAMES TEACHER OF YEAR:

Rio Vista Elementary teacher Mike Svoboda, center, was surprised by a visit by Steve McGowan, left, of the Palm Desert Sam's Club, when he presented him with a cake, gift card and \$1,000 check to the school for being chosen at the Sam's Club. Also pictured is Rio Vista Principal Mike Long.

MAYOR INVITES STUDENTS TO FILM FEST:

Eight lucky middle school students film buffs were invited to the recent Palm Springs International Film Festival gala as guests of Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet (center, with students). Students included Ashley Oertel and Maeson Pellum from Raymond Cree; Alexandria Croom, James O. Jessie Desert Highland Unity Center; Lexi Kassler, St. Theresa's; Ben Simonds and Haylea Trost, Palm Springs YMCA; Kalina Robles, City of Palm Springs Recreation Program; and Cheyenne Tweed, Desert Chapel.



ROTARY CLUB CONTRIBUTES:

The Palm Springs noon Rotary Club recently presented dictionaries to third graders at their adopted school, Cahuilla Elementary; and to principals of three other elementary schools for their third graders. Pictured (left to right) are Vista del Monte Principal Joe Scudder, Rotarian Bob Allan, Katherine Finchy Principal Mark Arnold, Project Chair Rotarian Milt Levinson, Cahuilla Principal Denise Ellis, Rotary President Jacque Wachs, Agua Caliente President Lucy Medina, Rotarian Kevin Nay, Supt. of Schools Dr. Lorri McCune and Rotarian Bob Elsner.



CHAMBER PRESENTS TOP AWARDS:

The Cathedral City Chamber of Commerce recently honored the winners of the annual Orion Awards at a Doral Resort dinner that also included the Chamber's installation of officers. Honorees included (from top to bottom) Youth of the Year Cathedral City High senior Dylan La France receiving a \$3,000 Chamber scholarship from Andy Jessup, Jr. of Jessup Motors; Educator of the Year Sunny Sands teacher Brenda Santana, receiving her award from Doug Kratky, of Morris Desert Media; and Sharon Everz, of the Cathedral City High Band Boosters, who received her Volunteer of the Year award from Harry Stone of West Coast Surveillance Systems. Not pictured, Carol Pipitone, a member of the Pinnacle Fund foundation for Palm Springs Unified School District, was named Woman of the Year.



CHHS AVID STUDENTS VISIT ROSE BOWL:

About 100 students in the Advanced Via Individual Determination (AVID) program at Cathedral City High School recently visited the Rose Bowl for a UCLA college fair and tailgate party followed by a game between the Bruins and Ohio State.

DANCE TEAM ATTENDS FOLLIES:

The Palm Springs High School Dance Team was recently invited to attend a performance of the Palm Springs Follies and get



some tips they hope to incorporate into their own routines from the dancers in the show, all over the age of 55. Follies officials said they hope to extend the invitation annually to the student dancers.



CHAMBER HONORS THREE SCHOLARS:

Three Palm Springs High School seniors received the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce's 2008 Rosalyn Bronstein Encouragement Awards at the Chamber's annual Athena Awards luncheon in December. Kirsten Kanarr, left, plans to attend University of California Davis to obtain a degree in equine veterinary medicine. Jung (Cloi) Cha, center, plans to pursue a career as a foreign service officer and work in US embassies and consulates around the world. Miranda Ravicz, right, is planning to study medicine or law and study abroad in Spain, China or South Korea. The Chamber gave each girl a \$1,000 scholarship.

TWO TIME TOP SPELLER:

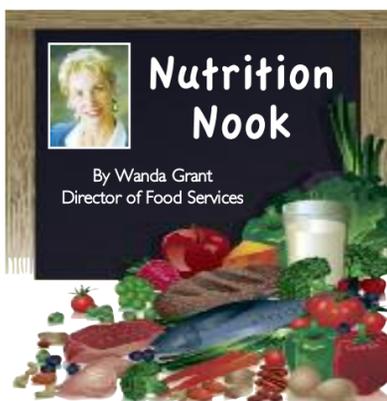
Jaryd Bongcaras, right, a 6th grader at James Workman Middle School, took top honors in the District's recent annual Spelling Bee for the second consecutive year and will represent PSUSD at the county bee next month. Kodiak Ravicz, a 7th grader at Raymond Cree MS, came in second place. Pictured with the victors is Jessica Arduini, assistant principal at Two Bunch Palms Elementary School, and spelling bee coordinator.



TECH HEROES:

Four teachers from Cielo Vista and Cahuilla Elementary were among five who received 20 refurbished Pentium IV computers for their schools by being chosen for a Technology Training Foundation of America (TTFA) Technology Heroes Golden Mouse. Cielo Vista's honorees were Jennifer Liebertz, fourth from right, and Amy Biggert, third from right. Cahuilla's honorees were Jeff Ballew, fourth from left, and Karen Foerch, fifth from left. The equipment was donated by Southern California Edison, represented by Kathy DeRosa, left, and Lin Juniper, second from left, and refurbishing was provided by TTFA, California Youth Authority at Chino and the Naval Consolidated Brig MCAS Miramar in San Diego. TTFA and Time Warner Cable-Desert Cities were sponsors for the eighth year. Also pictured, from left, are Cahuilla Principal Denise Ellis, TTFA President Jeanette Roache, Cielo Vista Principal Lynda Lake and Elle Torje of Time Warner Cable.





Nutrition Nook

By Wanda Grant
Director of Food Services

As district-wide testing approaches, administrators and teachers in the Palm Springs Unified School District prepare students by emphasizing math, language arts, and reading skills.

An increased emphasis on test scores means a more concerted effort to prepare students than ever before. Part of that preparation should include encouraging a healthy breakfast.

Studies have shown that kids who are fit, eat breakfast, and eat more nutrient-dense foods score higher on standardized tests than kids who don't! Scores in Math and Language Arts may be improved when students eat breakfast in particular.

There are additional benefits when students consume a morning meal. Students who eat breakfast at school are more likely to be on time in the morning, and are less likely to miss school. Other benefits include fewer visits to the health office and improved classroom behavior. Data also suggests that children who eat breakfast have better overall nutrition intake than those who don't.

The data is very clear. Kids who eat breakfast make better learners. Breakfast doesn't have to be a big production. A bowl of cereal with milk and a piece of fruit works great. Our school breakfast program is a prime example of what kids should eat every morning.

The healthiest breakfast include three or more food groups: protein (eggs, meat, or yogurt), complex carbohydrate (whole wheat breads or cereals), fruits, vegetables, or 100 percent juice (orange, pineapple, and tomato juice are great choices), and dairy (non-fat or low-fat milk or yogurt).

It is about more than test scores. Our students benefit in so many ways by eating fruits, vegetables, and breakfast every day, they not only learn better, but will be healthier in the long run.

Wanda Grant is a registered dietitian with credentials in Pediatric Nutrition and Childhood Overweight/Obesity Management, and has degrees in Food and Nutrition Science and Institutional Management from Washington State University.

Celebs Promote Reading to Kids

Nearly 40 actors and performers, including Edith Hyde-White and former NFL star and movie actor Tim Brown, are in Coachella Valley elementary schools each week to help instill the joy of reading and promote literacy.

They are a part of Coachella Valley BookPALS, one of 12 programs across the nation sponsored by the Screen Actors Guild Foundation. Nationwide more than 2,000 volunteers read aloud to more than 100,000 preschool to 5th grade students.

Tere Romero Britton, the Coachella Valley coordinator of BookPALS (Performing Artists for Literacy in Schools), says that local actors and performers are reading in 51 classrooms to nearly 1,300 students each week.

Here in Palm Springs Unified, the program is currently operating at Cathedral City, Cielo Vista and Bubbling Wells Elementary Schools. Landau Elementary is considering coming on board as well.

We are eager to add more schools and are always accepting more volunteers to

read," said Britton. "All of our readers talk about how rewarding and exciting it is to be able to share the joy of reading."

BookPALS was founded in Los Angeles in 1993 by "Mission Impossible" star Barbara Bain, who saw how receptive her own grandchildren were to being read to and wanted to expand to a wider audience, particularly in Title 1 schools.

"The direct connection between children listening to stories being read aloud and development of their own skills has been established beyond any doubt," said Jan Powell, national director of BookPALS. "Children must be



Former NFL star Tim Brown shares "The Readers' Oath" with a Cathedral City Elementary second grade class.

exposed to the magic of books to develop a love of reading."

For readers, it's an hour commitment once a week. For students, it's an enrichment of their lives that will last a lifetime.

To learn more about BookPALS, call Tere Romero Britton at (760) 898-4052 or email coachellavalley@bookpals.net.

Desert Springs MS Students Exploring Energy and Emerging Technologies Path PSUSD Students Pioneering Career Program

Two hundred eighth grade students at Desert Springs Middle School in Desert Hot Springs are pioneering the first-ever Energy and Emerging Technologies Career Explorations program in the Coachella Valley.

This innovative program is linking students, their teachers and counselors with energy and technology businesses across the region to help them discover the wide variety of careers waiting for them right here in the Coachella Valley.

"The goal of this program is to help students see first-hand what's happening with energy and emerging technology-related careers and to inspire them to consider pursuing careers in this field," said Marek Pramuka, Advanced Technology Industry Council Coordinator for the Coachella Valley



Marek Pramuka, standing, left, meets with Desert Springs Middle School students about energy and emerging technologies. Listening is DSMS counselor George Brady.

Economic Partnership (CVEP). "These students will have local career opportunities related to wind energy, geo-thermal, solar, alternative vehicle technologies and other renewable and sustainable industries. By partnering with their teachers, we motivate students to study math and science which will be key to their success as they move forward. This industry and classroom experience also helps to inspire a

next generation of environmentally conscious citizens and consumers. They see the connection between their science classrooms, the chemist that they met at the water district and their everyday life and all of sudden it clicks."

PSUSD has partnered with CVEP to develop and implement this program, which is linked to the new Energy Technology Utilities academic pathway that launches for ninth graders at Desert Hot Springs High School next fall. These eighth graders will be able to continue their study next year at high school with new Earth Science and Electronics/Alternative Energy courses. DHSHS Assistant Principal, Kate Mason is leading a team of high school academic teachers, career technical teachers, counselors and business partners to develop this new pathway.

The Career Explorations program was funded by a grant from California Department of Education. Southern California Edison, Mission Springs Water District, Coachella Valley Water District, Sunline Transit Agency, Cal Energy and Desert Water Agency are partnering to provide half-day interactive tours of their facilities for these students.

For more information on the program, call Dr. Diana Verney at 416-6073.

Grew Up In Palm Springs Popular Author Will Speak at Palm Springs HS

The Palm Springs Public Library will present Author Ellen Hopkins, author of *New York Times* bestselling novel "Crank," in-person at the Library and Palm Springs HS on Monday, March 9.

The novel is loosely based on Hopkins' older daughter's addiction to crystal meth, written from her daughter's point-of-view. Connecting with teens, her subsequent novels deal with issues such as abuse and mental illness.

Hopkins will speak at PSHS at 9 a.m. in the Black Box Theater. Students interested in attending can sign up with Librarian Kathleen O'Malley.

At 3 p.m. Hopkins will conduct a writing workshop for students grades six through 12 at the Palm Springs Public Library. This event is free and open to all students in 6th - 12th grade only. At 6:30 p.m. at the Library, Hopkins will discuss her career in a presentation for all ages. This event is also free and open to the public.

Hopkins grew up in Palm Springs and began her writing career at age nine, with a poem published in *The Desert Sun* newspaper. She is the author of five *New York Times* bestselling young adult novels-in-verse.

'Diamonds in the Rough' Identified Early

Some of the District's middle school students who have not realized their potential could be the same students who emerge as some of the key leaders at their schools and in the community.

This year's new "Diamonds in the Rough" project, funded by an Anderson Children's Grant, is the brain child of the District's Coordinator of Student Assistant Programs Mike Wong. Along with the creative energy of Brenda Gunderson, school counselor at Ramon Alternative Center, a training model for this project was produced. Students from each middle school have been identified by school counselors and teachers as potential leaders but have not yet been engaged in their school community. The program begins with a 3-day retreat at which eight students from each of the four middle schools are led through activities and exercises that help them to recognize their talents, work in groups, set goals for their schools, build trust, make decisions and plan school and community service projects. The first retreat, for 7th and 8th graders was held in the fall, and the second - with an additional group of 32 6th and 7th grade students - was held earlier this month.

"We learned how to trust each other and to earn trust," said Cody Gfroerer, a 7th grade student at Nellie Coffman Middle School. "I feel that I can trust people more now because I used to not trust people. I learned that I can decide whether to trust people by how they act."

"The goal is to help the students to become better leaders and have an intrinsic want to provide service to the school and community. We want to help them to

be better citizens," said Linda Wilson, a counselor at Coffman and the school's program facilitator.

"I learned that helping others is important and team work is important," said retreat participant Adam Shabli, a 7th grader at Coffman. "It is a great experience, and you could learn a lot from it."

Citing an example of how he's grown from the program in just a few short months, Shabli noted that his baseball team members have already seen a change in him.

"My teammates told me they could see how it is helping me," Shabli said. "I've stopped getting mad at people so fast. They told me they see I've cooled off."

"We hope to get them (the participants) into leadership positions next year," said Wilson. "So far as a group, they (the students) have really come together. They are coming up with ideas and working together."

"You learn how to express yourself with people," said Daisy Franco, a Coffman

student in the program. "I'm not shy anymore. I've learned how to make friends."

"I'm learning how to be comfortable around people," added Lisa Norris. "I'm making new friends without starting fights. And after school at our meetings we've been talking about what we can do to better the community."

Franco said the NNC students are planning a car wash and bake sale and plan to donate proceeds to the Children's Discovery Museum of the Desert.

"It feels good to help and it helps you to feel good about yourself when you get to help other people," Franco said.

"We're teaching the students problem-solving skills, coping skills and leadership skills so they can re-enter their school community and emerge as leaders through service to their school within a sense of belonging to something positive and important," said Wong. "It is the intent of this project to see if the involvement by a student in this way would improve his/her attendance, behavior and grades."



Last fall's "Diamonds in the Rough" retreat participants show off the banners they made to bring back to their schools.



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