

# Merriam School

## ■ Community News ■

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 6, FEBRUARY 1, 2008

### MESSAGE FROM SANDRA

#### What's Happening at Merriam?

When I walk around Merriam, I am impressed by the engaging, meaningful and practical teaching and learning experiences I see. Here are some recent examples that I would like to share:

#### School-Wide

All classes in grades 1-6 are preparing for student-led conferences. Students are reflecting on what they've learned since school started in September.

Recent All-School Meeting presentations have included a Martin Luther King story and song, individual musicians, faculty chorus, a recycling skit and games.

#### Kindergarten

Students drew pictures of themselves in December and wrote about what they were doing in the picture. This is part of a year-long look at the changes in the seasons and in themselves. Students wrote the sounds they heard in the words they wanted to write.

Kindergartners have just visited Higgins Armory as part of their Medieval Times study. The classrooms evidence medieval learning with grinding wheat, castle play, and growing beans, peas and rye. The students have science journals in which observational drawings and comments about the plant growth are recorded.

#### First Grade

Children were excited about discovering baby whelks in the egg cases found on the beach.

In daily phonics lessons, students are learning the sounds and rules that govern them. A dictation last week was: The farmer sold ears of corn to our family.

Students are learning to write one sentence and then another on the same idea. Illustrating ideas first often helps them write more than one sentence on a given topic. They write in journals about their lives in and outside of school.

In art they made interesting and colorful paper sculptures.

#### Second Grade

Students are learning about rocks and minerals in science study.

Students are working on writing five to seven sentences on a topic related to their personal experience.

In art, students created three-dimensional multi-colored paper creations.

In math, students have learned the names of the coins and are working on adding them and recording the total.

#### Third Grade

Students are learning about the pilgrims and went on a recent field trip to Plimoth Plantation.

*Contd. on pg. 2 Sandra*

#### Lynn Armstrong New PTO Co-Chair

As of January, the Utt family no longer has children at the Merriam School. Sadly, this means that Cathy Utt will slowly transition out of the position of PTO Co-Chair during the next few months. Luckily, her dedication and care for Merriam will allow our new co-chair to take these months to slowly transition into that post.

Cathy and I would like to formally welcome Lynn Armstrong as our new PTO Co-Chair. We have already been working with Lynn for almost a month, and as many of you already know, she is warm, enthusiastic, organized, energetic, articulate and dedicated to Merriam. We feel so lucky she said yes! Having a friendly, knowledgeable PTO co-chair already in place for the next few months will be especially important as we go through one of Merriam's biggest transitions ever: the retirement of Sandra and the hiring of a new principal. And while this was not planned, it happens that Lynn is on the Merriam Principal Search Committee. So she will have met our future principal prior to hiring and will have a head start on developing a relationship with him or her.

Over the next few months, Lynn, Cathy and I will all function as co-chairs. Because some of our usual roles might be shifting during the transition period, we would very much appreciate it if you would cc all three of us when you send emails with questions or updates. That will make it much easier for all of us to stay informed and be helpful to all of you.

-- Carol Leandro

Contd. from pg. 1 Sandra

Students are learning to write more than one paragraph on a topic and have learned to use graphic organizers to plan their own writing.

In science, they are learning about the components that make up soils.

In math, students are testing absorbency by discovering how to measure area using drops on several different paper towels and centimeter graph paper.

Children are learning to play the recorder in music class.

In art they have just completed landscape collages with cut, textured paper they created.

#### Fourth grade

Students are working toward the goal of writing a five-paragraph essay. Organizing and preplanning become very important.

They are putting a final polish on their upcoming choral musical performance with music teacher Karen Shepard.

In math students are learning about factors, multiples and exponents.

In social studies, students are studying the various regions of the United States

and are learning about Native American peoples and where they live. The impact of the geography of the region on their lives is a focus. Projects in this study include constructing story bags with creation stories from various tribes, weaving baskets and sewing dolls.

#### Fifth Grade

Students are studying ecosystems in science. The effects of pollution on plant and animal life are startling the young scientists.

Students are about to learn the basic understandings of adding and subtracting fractions.

Children wrote their own fairy tales.

Students are writing poetry.

Writing a research paper is a major focus of language arts at this grade.

American history pictorial time lines are being designed. The students are writing Revolutionary War character sketches.

#### Sixth Grade

Students are involved in a multi-disciplinary study of Ancient Civilizations. They are learning about the development of civilizations.

In math students are learning about data collection and how to graph and interpret the data.

Students are working with music teacher Chris Porth to finalize their annual musical production.

Students created an imaginary archeological dig called "Merriam School of the Mysteries."

A major writing project called "Dream Writing Project" was just completed and displayed.



#### Merriam Yard Sale Scheduled for May 3



Starting your spring cleaning? Save it for the Annual Merriam Yard Sale! This year, the event will be held Saturday, May 3, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Clean your house and come shop to raise money for a great cause: Yard sale proceeds ensure that the sixth-graders get a superior send-off at the end of the school year.

Save those great items:

- Furniture and other household items;
- Books, movies and music;
- Puzzles, games and toys in good shape; and
- Sports equipment.

Block the time if you can volunteer with Friday afternoon set-up, Saturday morning sales support, and/or post-sale dispersal of unsold items to local charities. Please contact Sandy Cummings at [scummings@ariamarketing.com](mailto:scummings@ariamarketing.com) or (978) 201-2752 to volunteer!

#### Lost & Found Fair Starts February 11



The next Parker Damon Building Lost & Found Fair will be held the week before February break, beginning on February 11 and ending at noon on February 15. All items without identifying names will be displayed in the hallway outside the

multi-purpose room at the bottom of the main staircase. Any items left at the end of the sale will be donated to local charities.

Please remind your children to check the fair for clothing and lunch boxes they may have lost. Parents are welcome to check the fair anytime the building is open, from roughly 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. on school days. Just remember to sign in during school hours.

## A Banner Year For the Camp Fair

Merriam's fifteenth annual Summer Options Camp Fair took place Tuesday, January 22. We had an excellent turnout of parents, teachers



and prospective campers from Acton and surrounding towns. Thank you to the Merriam families and staff who attended.

A total of 87 camps participated in the fair. We added 15 more tables and moved into the gym this year to total 77 exhibitors for the night. Camps measure the success of a fair by the attendees through the door, and they were extremely happy with the continuous crowds as well as the helpful PTO staff.

We are very happy to report that the Camp Fair fundraiser achieved record high gross revenues of \$15,000! After all expenses are submitted, we expect the Merriam 2008 Camp Fair to contribute \$12,500 in net revenue to the Merriam School Community Fund.

There were key volunteers whose contributions were a major factor in the planning and success of the event. Thank you to Gina Crooks for continued role as the 2008 Camp Fair Directory Editor; Marisa Olsen for Publicity, Raffle and Event Planning; Cathy Utt for district wide publicity and consultant at large; Donna German for stepping in as bake sale coordinator; Karla Smith for publicity, Elena Petrov helping with district publicity; and Katy Frey for updating the Camp Fair Web Page. For the fourth year, Tony Ain devised and implemented the electrical needs for our camps in the Gym.

There were many moving parts to this event. Thank you to all who worked

hard so that this event would run smoothly.

Bag Stuffing: Jenny Patterson, Caroline Weaver, Stephanie Cahoon, Hannah Bloch, Tina Hamilton, Marisa Olsen, Kelly McEwen, Katy Frey, Beth McKeon, Cathy von Jess and Nina Englander.

Gym Set Up & Camp Hospitality: Janice Fahey, Gina Crooks, Deborah Elkhoury, Jenny Patterson, Griet Dehandschutter, John Huber, Donna McGavick, Beth McKeon, Caroline Weaver, Lauren Pollock and Tony Ain.

Camp Check In: Janice Fahey, Nina Englander, George Chigas, Naeem Siddiqui and Archana Gupta.

Bake Sale and Food Concession, Event Staff and Clean Up: Donna German, Paul Murphy, Susan Avery, Cath Smith, Sanjay Khosla, Maura Pavao, Joanne Urso, Stephanie Parry, Sue Metcalf, Laura Wordsworth, Shannon Bischoff, Luke Zhang, Cathy Utt, Ellin Tsiaras, Monica Doyon, Milla Diakonova, Eleanor Ahlborn, Elena Petrov, Susan Yan, Reshma Singh and Sherene Raisbeck.

The Bake Sale was again a huge crowd pleaser and a tremendous success. Thank you again to Donna German for heading up this part of the event.



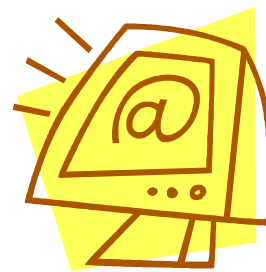
Response from the Merriam Community in providing baked goods was incredible! All of the yummy goodies were disappearing fast from our bake sale tables - in fact, we sold practically all of the food. Thank you to everyone who took time to bake. We were able to make \$723 just from the Bake Sale! Thanks to our legions of gracious bakers. Space constraints prevent us from listing all the names here, but please

know that we appreciate all of your delicious baked goods.

The Merriam PTO also extends warm thanks to the businesses sponsoring or donating supplies for the Camp Fair this year. They include Cambridge Savings Bank, Roche Brothers, Domino's Pizza, Welch's, Dunkin Donuts, Donelan's, Quill & Press and Copyland.

The Merriam PTO should be proud of offering this free event for so many consecutive years. Each year it has increased its contribution to the Merriam Community Fund. Our goal is for the Camp Fair to reach the \$16,500 mark as a fundraiser for Merriam. We have some new and exciting ideas to help this happen, but implementation will require more parent volunteers. Please contact Trudy Khosla at (978) 263-6258 or [trudykhosla@aol.com](mailto:trudykhosla@aol.com) to get involved with next year's Camp Fair - set for January 2009!

- Trudy Khosla



### Did You Know?

At the Merriam PTO website, you can access information on the fair's participating camp programs. Go to [www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org), click on *Camp Fair*, and then click on the Participating Camps button on the left. Have fun!

## School Council Examines Homework Issues

Homework. The mere mention of the word can cause profuse sweating, hyperventilation and headaches - and that's just among parents. Throw in the average busy student and the conditions are perfect for considerable stress. With an eye toward relieving some of that stress, the School Council held a homework forum last month, seeking parent input on the challenges facing parents as they support their children's efforts with homework.

Parents were asked what factors made them feel successful about their homework (back in the Dark Ages when they were in elementary school), and also reported what they felt were positive factors in helping their kids with homework. Among those factors: peer tutors, effective feedback and communication between parents and the school, and a setting that's conducive to completing school work.

The forum also gave parents the opportunity to discuss the barriers to supporting their kids with homework and to offer suggestions on removing those barriers. Among the barriers: unclear expectations. Some kids and parents often struggle in determining the aim of a homework assignment, the steps they should take to complete it, and what the finished product should look like. For some students (and their parents), that uncertainty leads to frustration and a lack of confidence in their work.

At Merriam, teachers work hard to be available and offer guidelines for homework. However, parents acknowledged that even clearer guidelines could go a long way to alleviating parent and student frustration. Specifically, parents would like more help with understanding what's expected of students, concrete suggestions on how to help when students are struggling,

and regular feedback on completed assignments. Better communication with teachers is key, another group of parents noted, and could take the form of homework guidelines on a website or a posted list of study skills or a homework workshop early in the year.

One group of parents suggested a "triangle" contract, a three-way agreement between the student, his or her parents and the teacher that would spell out for all three parties what's expected.



Another barrier cited by the group is the difficulty in managing time and structuring homework. One way to resolve that barrier, the group suggested, would be a better understanding of each grade level's curriculum, a clear picture of study skills that are needed, and guidelines for how long an assignment should take and how much parents should help. Other ideas for supporting parents as they help their kids with homework include homework buddies, similar to reading buddies, and a homework resource area.

The forum is part of the School Council's ongoing work to increase parents' involvement with their children's education. The meetings's format enables the school council to quickly obtain a lot of very useful information about what parents need, noted Carol Leandro, the forum's facilitator. The School Council will review the information gathered at the forum, identifying the issues that stood out among the others, and determine how to best implement ways to support parents as they help their kids with homework. A teacher's study group on parental involvement is also exploring the

issue, taking into account what they heard at the forum and determining how to implement solutions.

If you were unable to attend the forum but would like to offer your input on the homework issue, please contact Sandra or a member of the School Council.

## Parent Support Group: Take Care of Yourself

Does dealing with your struggling child feel so draining and hard that you are afraid you may lose it at times? Could you use some advice on ways to help you as a parent cope during these difficult times? If so, come join us on March 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the R.J Grey Junior High Library as Dr. Nancy Sullivan speaks about ways to help ourselves get through these challenging times with our children.

Dr. Sullivan will present some calming techniques for parents, strategies to use to deal with your child's behavioral issues, and most importantly, ways to help parents get through daily struggles with their child. Dr. Sullivan, a clinical psychologist at Children's Hospital, provides family-based behavioral therapy for children with a complex developmental, behavioral and psychiatric diagnosis.

In addition to hosting this meeting, the Acton Boxborough Support Group for Parents of Children with Challenges will also have monthly morning meetings at 9:30 a.m. on February 13 (topic: anxiety) and April 3 (topic: take care of yourself) at Acton Boxborough High School, Room 121 East. We will discuss the topics in addition to our general open session. For further information on our group, contact Francesca Ricciardi at [fmr08@verizon.net](mailto:fmr08@verizon.net) or Lynn Armstrong at [lynn.armstrong2@verizon.net](mailto:lynn.armstrong2@verizon.net).

## Stay Informed And Voice Your Opinion

On its website, the School Committee urges everyone to "become more knowledgeable about the critical issues that we all face together as the communities of Acton and Boxborough and become actively involved in supporting our public schools."

The School Committee is in the process of finalizing next year's budget. Two critical issues are under consideration: Technology in the Classroom and Class Sizes. Both of these issues have direct and far-reaching impacts on the daily experience and long-term education of our children. We urge all parents to learn more about these issues and to be sure that the School Committee knows how you feel about both.

Some ways to learn more:

- Visit the School Committee website <http://ab.mec.edu/about/schoolcommittee.shtml>;
- Read the minutes from the meetings by downloading the School Committee Packet from recent meetings;
- Ask Sandra and/or your child's teacher;
- Write or talk to a school committee member.

As you explore these issues, **remember that teachers and principals are some of our best resources for understanding the educational needs of our children.** They know first-hand how class size and technology affect the functioning of their classrooms and their ability to meet students' educational needs. Send them an email or give them a call!

**And then, make your voice heard: go to the next School Committee Meeting on Thursday, February 28, at 7:30 p.m. at the Junior High**

**Library.** Remember that just being there with lots of other Merriam parents tells the School Committee a lot. And if you can speak forthrightly about what's best for our children based on educational standards, teachers' experience and concrete student needs, then we can be sure that the School Committee hears what parents want for their children.

## Cultural Enrichment Events Planned

Cultural Enrichment arranges for a variety of performances and cultural events to enhance and deepen the educational experience of Merriam students. There are several Cultural Enrichment events coming up this spring to note on your calendars.

On Monday, March 3, Merriam will welcome children's author Stephen Krensky. Mr. Krensky's books include *A Big Day for Scepters*, *The Dragon Circle*, *Lionel at Large*, *The Iron Dragon Never Sleeps* and *Big Bad Wolves at School*.

Mr. Krensky will begin his visit with a presentation at the All-School Meeting. He will use several of his books as examples to demonstrate the writing and publishing processes that transform an idea into a book. As a follow-up to the school-wide presentation, Mr. Krensky will take part in workshops with students in grades 3 through 6. There will also be an opportunity for the students to bring along their books to be signed by Mr. Krensky. For more information about the author, go to [www.stephenkrensky.com](http://www.stephenkrensky.com).

On Wednesday, March 12 from 6-9 p.m., please join the Merriam Community at Willow Books in Acton for our second annual Willow Books Night. Last year's event was a great success, giving parents the opportunity to browse while their children listened to Merriam teachers read their favorite

books. A percentage of all sales during this evening will benefit Cultural Enrichment programs at Merriam.

A few other programs are in the planning stages, including the Bamidele Drummers, who are tentatively scheduled for an all-school performance on May 23.

Please contact Cathy Castaneda ([cathy\\_castaneda@hotmail.com](mailto:cathy_castaneda@hotmail.com)) or Catherine Smith ([catb.a.smith66@gmail.com](mailto:catb.a.smith66@gmail.com)) if you have any questions about Cultural Enrichment.



**Have  
Dinner and  
Have Fun  
at  
Merriam's February Social  
and  
Celebrate the Chinese New  
Year and Valentine's Day**

February 11, 5:30 -7:00 p.m.

Parker Damon Cafetorium

We need your help to make this night a success.

To help out, contact Dorene Bowe-Shulman at [boweshulman@verizon.net](mailto:boweshulman@verizon.net).

**Merriam School  
Community News**

Editor: Sue Follett  
Production: Joe Campo

The next Community News will be published on February 29, 2008.

Email articles to Sue at  
[TheFollett5@verizon.net](mailto:TheFollett5@verizon.net) by  
February 22, 2008.

# BULLETIN BOARD

## This & That



### Merriam School/PTO Events:

- Tuesday, February 5: **Kindergarten Parent Information Evening.** Starts at 7:00 p.m. For incoming kindergarten families from Acton to learn more about Merriam.
- Friday, February 8 -15: **The Merriam Scholastic Book Fair.** Parker Damon Lobby. Open during school days. Also open following Student-Led Conferences and during the Winter Family Social.
- Friday, February 8 -15: **Student-Led Conferences.**
- Monday, February 11: **PTO Winter Family Social.** Starts at 5:30 p.m. in the Cafetorium.
- Wednesday, February 13: **Birthday Lunch** - February birthdays.

### Ongoing on Saturdays during Basketball Season:

- Snack Sales at Community Ed basketball games. Parker Damon Lobby. If you'd like to help by volunteering an hour of your time, contact Suzanne at [suzanne-joris@comcast.net](mailto:suzanne-joris@comcast.net)

### A/B Regional School or Acton Town Events:

- Tuesday, February 12: **Fifth Grade Market Math Mania**, a parent-child math event sponsored by Acton Parent Involvement Project and Roche Bros. Open house 4:30-7:30 p.m. at Roche Bros. For more info, visit [www.actonpip.org](http://www.actonpip.org).

Thursday, February 28: **Acton School Committee Meeting.** 7:30 p.m.; R.J. Grey Junior High Library.

**No School - Winter Vacation:  
February 18-22**

## Your Efforts Benefit Merriam

Keep sending in your register receipts from Donelan's and Crosby's markets. Thanks to a lot of busy shoppers in the Merriam community, we received a considerable amount of register receipts from Donelan's and Crosby's in December and January. December's deposit was \$16,066.57 and January's was \$18,742.93, bringing Merriam's year-to-date cash value total to \$46,774.11.

We have until March 31, 2008 to collect receipts for our account. Merriam receives one cash value point for every dollar turned in. In April, Merriam will select school equipment based on our total cash value account. Every receipt, no matter the amount, adds to our total. Receipts can be sent in with the children or deposited in the collection box in the school office. If you have any questions regarding the program, you may contact Tricia Forrester at [pvforrester@gmail.com](mailto:pvforrester@gmail.com).

Attention all you Target shoppers: be sure to enroll your REDcard in Target's

Take Charge of Education program and choose Merriam School in Acton from their list of eligible schools. Once enrolled, 1% of your REDcard purchases at Target and Target.com will be donated to Merriam. Proceeds are distributed twice a year, in March and September, and for some schools total as much as \$10,000 a year.

Finally, spread the word to friends and family and enlist their help clipping and saving Box Top for Education coupons for Merriam. Look for Box Tops labels on some of your favorite General Mills products. Send them in to school with your children or drop them off in the office. For more information, check out [www.boxtops4education.com](http://www.boxtops4education.com) or contact Susan Russell at [susanbrussell@yahoo.com](mailto:susanbrussell@yahoo.com).

## Happy Valentines Day!



## Scholastic Book Fair Is Coming To Merriam!

The annual Scholastic Book Fair will be at Merriam February 8 through February 15. There are many opportunities for you to attend this great event! The chart below lists the hours that the Book Fair will be open.

Students in grades one through six will visit the Book Fair with their classes during the day, and kindergartners are welcome to visit any time with their parents.

To volunteer to help with the Book Fair, please contact Pam Shields at [pincumbeshields@comcast.net](mailto:pincumbeshields@comcast.net) or (978) 263-1674.

Friday, Feb. 8 Book Fair Begins!	7:30 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 9	8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 11	7:30 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.
February Social	5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 12	7:30 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 13	7:30 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.
Thursday, Feb. 14	7:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 15	7:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.