



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
Oregon Small Schools Association

Winter 2010

The Road Less Traveled



By: Al Meunier
OSSA Executive Director

Santiam Canyon School District is located east of Salem in the Willamette Valley. Mr. Brad Yates is the superintendent.

Brad is a graduate of Linfield College and has been superintendent for 12 years. When Brad arrived at Santiam Canyon School District, the enrollment was 800 students. Currently the enrollment is 600 students. To deal with budget constraints the District has gone to a four day a week program. This has created some savings in salaries and utilities. It has also created a great opportunity for approximately 20 high school students. The U.S. Forest Service and the State Fish and Wildlife have entered into a contract with the district to employ students on Fridays and Saturdays to improve fish spawning beds and do maintenance on forest trails. The work is supervised by four school district staff members who are also paid for their work. The work will continue during summer vacation.

Many students from Santiam Canyon School District cannot afford post secondary education. Several years ago the community made a commitment to alter that situation with a scholarship banquet. This year the project was again a roaring success.

Through the support from many donors, sponsors and attendees, this year's Santiam Canyon School District's Scholarship Banquet netted \$27,000 for the futures of Santiam students. It was an exciting evening, starting with a great "Italian Banchetto" themed meal, followed by raffles, "spirited" auctions, side

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Nycz reflects on teaching contributions



By: David Nycz, Stanfield Elementary
OSSA 2009-2010 Teacher of the Year

Greetings to you all, members of the Oregon Small Schools Association. I am honored and humbled to have been chosen as this year's OSSA Teacher of the Year. In years past, I recall reading many of the *Small Talk* articles written by previous recipients of this award. I would often wonder what it took to receive such an honor and discerned if I would ever become of the proper caliber as an educator to even be nominated or

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OSSA Teacher of the Year David Nycz works with his students at Stanfield Elementary School. Contributed Photo

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considered. Well, my wondering is over and many of my thoughts regarding this reward lead me to reflect on how I arrived at this illuminated point in my career.

My teaching experiences have all been in small schools. I began my student teaching in the communities of Silverton, Jefferson, and Independence, Ore. The Neah-Kah-Nie School District in Rockaway Beach, Ore., became my first step into the education profession. Following 10 years of teaching in the coastal community, I returned to my home romping grounds of eastern Oregon to be closer to family. I now work in the educational community of the Stanfield School District and reside with my wife and children in my hometown of Hermiston. My professional experience is rich in the aspects of the small school climate, but also includes the perspectives attained by living in three regions of our beautiful state.



Reflecting on where I am in my profession leads me to recall many key mentors, authors, and important events in my life. My hope is to give honor, this year especially, to those people who impacted my life, propelled my career, and helped to build my character as a successful educator. I believe this award is not a reflection of my efforts alone, but by the culminating lifelong positive influences of good people, both of the past and in the present. It was one of these mentors who said that "it is the things we honor and respect that we also receive, attain and assimilate in ourselves."

Just this last year, I began a master's program. Large portions of the initial books for the courses related to the practices, disposition and integrity of the teaching professional. Relating our effectiveness in a learning community to our character, the authors would suggest that all professionals take time to reflect on what brought them to teaching. Dr. Sonita Nieto (*What Keeps Teachers Going?* 2003) offers this perspective: "Teachers do not leave their values at the door when they enter their classrooms. On the contrary, as much as they might want to hide or avoid them, their values and beliefs slip in the door with them. In fact, teachers bring their entire autobiographies with them: their expressions, identities, values, beliefs, attitudes, hang-ups, biases, wishes, dreams, and hopes. It is useless for them to deny this; the most they can do is acknowledge how these may either get in the way of, or enhance, their work with students."

Through this type of reflection we can identify those powerful qualities which foster learning. In the same reflective manner, professionals also address and prune traits which have an opposite effect on the entire learning community.

The application and screening process for the Teacher of the Year award brought me to reflect and identify key attributes in my teaching practices. The letters of support for the nomination, provided by coworkers in my professional community, revealed to me what my colleagues perceive, respect and value in me. Upon receiving the award, my heart reflected deeply towards all those who contributed to this honored recognition. The autobiography I bring to my classroom and professional community has been written, in part, by many good people, and continues to be written today. These people, be blessed! For they have my dearest gratitude, tribute, and respect. My honor be their honor.

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Riddle, Elkton schools make A-list

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Two local high schools now have bragging rights as counting among the nation's best. Riddle and Elkton were named bronze medal schools in the U.S. News & World Report's list of America's Best High Schools for 2009.

The news magazine looked at 21,786 public high schools in 48 states and Washington, D.C., to whittle its list down to the top 100 school earning gold medals. Silver medals went to 405 schools and 1,086 received bronze. Of the 283 Oregon high schools evaluated, none qualified for gold medals. Nine received silver medals and 24 got bronze. Riddle and Elkton were the only two Douglas County schools to earn places on the medal list.

Riddle senior Daycia Mauer, 17, was surprised Wednesday when she heard the news announced at a school assembly.

"We have never done that good, so it's kind of crazy that we made the list," she said. "People might actually look at us and think 'It's a good school — they might not have much, but they have a good education.'"

The report looked at just that. Developed by a data research business belonging to Standard & Poor's, the report evaluated schools on three levels: better than average performance on state tests adjusted for the school's percentage of economically disadvantaged students; least-disadvantaged student performance compared with others across the state; and college readiness based on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests.

Neither Riddle nor Elkton has AP classes due to their small sizes, but both have high numbers of low-income students. According to U.S. News & World Report, Riddle has 64 percent and Elkton has 53 percent of students considered economically disadvantaged. Both schools have higher free and reduced lunch rates, which is also an indicator of local poverty as well as families teetering just above that line.

Mike Hughes, superintendent and principal for Elkton schools, said it was his understanding that the North County school could have made it to the silver medal category had Elkton offered AP courses. He was happy with the recognition, though, and said the new charter school now has the opportunity to offer college-level courses.

"Man, I'm really extremely happy for what the staff is doing

here and am impressed with the education kids are receiving," he said Wednesday. "It's a really impressive and amazing thing for us."

With 51 students, Elkton was the 13th-smallest school in the U.S. to be ranked bronze or higher. The ranking pitted schools against each other regardless of size.

One Elkton student wasn't surprised by her close-knit school's award. "It's something I kind of expected because we have such a great school," said Joanna Evoniuk, senior class president. "One thing that I like is the relationship the teachers have with students ... and everyone in the school is friends and can hang out together."

Hughes worked at another school previously listed in the annual report and is already using the stamp of honor to draw more interest into the fledgling charter school.

The news is still sinking in at Riddle.

Terry Prestianni, principal at Riddle High School, was puzzled by the e-mail he received over winter break and a more recent call from the magazine in January.

"That scared me a little — I was thinking, 'What could I possibly say to U.S. News & World?'" he told students in an assembly Wednesday.

Last week, Prestianni told his staff; the district is still working out how Riddle will use the medal for self-promotion. "Their reaction was 'cool,' but a little reserved," he said last week. "They're all very practical and realize statistics aren't always the best measurement."

By Wednesday, the idea had grown on teachers and aides and they hoped their students would be proud, too. "It's pretty neat — it shows our hard work is paying off," said teacher Jon Bishop. "In this profession, we're trying to be supportive and encourage them all the time. Now they're going to see the results of that."

Riddle seventh-grader Tristen Exceen, 12, was still chewing it over as he ate lunch in the gym after the assembly. "I was actually pretty amazed. I didn't think we could, 'cause we're, like, small," he said between bites.

You can reach reporter DD Bixby at 957-4211 or by e-mail at dbixby@nrtoday.com.

"People might actually look at us and think, 'It's a good school — they might not have much, but they have a good education.'"

***~ Daycia Mauer, 17
Riddle High School Senior***

Willamina Elementary wins USDA's HealthierUS School Challenge silver award

By: Mark Jeffery, Superintendent & Lynne Duda, Nutrition Service Director
Willamina School District

Willamina Elementary School students received a big surprise Oct. 15, 2009, when representatives from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and the Oregon Department of Education presented them with the USDA's 2009 *HealthierUS* School Challenge (HUSSC) silver award.



Willamina School District, under the direction of Superintendent Mark Jeffery, has the distinction of being the first in Oregon to receive a HUSSC award, and joins only 569 other U.S. schools that have met the *HealthierUS* School Challenge criteria. The School Challenge is designed to build upon

USDA's Team Nutrition program, which provides schools with nutrition education materials for children and families based on the principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*; technical assistance materials for school food service directors, managers and staff; and materials to build school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity. In addition, the Challenge builds on USDA's efforts to improve the nutritional quality of school meals.

"Our District was one of the flagship schools in Oregon to adopt the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program," said Lynne Duda, Willamina's Nutrition Service Director. "We changed all our bread, spaghetti and rice over to whole grain. We can serve a variety of foods that kids like and they're still healthy." The goal of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is to increase children's consumption of fruits and vegetables by providing a fresh fruit and/or vegetable snack every day at school for free.

After the award ceremony, the State and USDA dignitaries shared a nutritional school lunch with the students, staff and visitors, and attended a Green School Tour of the Willamina School District's recycling area, supervised by the elementary school student's Green School Team.

Duda has also been selected for her second trip to Washington, D.C., where she will visit with members of the U.S Congress to discuss their continued support for the National School Lunch Program and other nutrition and health-related issues.

Superintendent Jeffery said Duda is an exceptional food services director who works tirelessly to provide the students of the District with access to nutritious foods. She established a summer "Lunch in the Park" program, and recently created and organized a "Healthy Meals in a Backpack" program to provide weekend meals to those students who may not have access to adequate or nutritious meals at home. Providing students with proper meals helps in the short term by ensuring they are healthy enough to take full advantage of their educations and in the long term by building good eating habits that will serve them well in the future.



Planes, trains and gold mines!

Humbolt Elementary School first graders, of the Grant School District, enjoyed some fun field trips last fall, as part of their unit on transportation. The group traveled to Sumpter, Oregon, to ride the old steam train and tour the dredge. They even had time to pan for gold.

The following week the students went to the John Day Regional Airport to learn about airplanes and helicopters. They were entertained by Dave Feiger and his homemade aircraft. The students also learned about flying a small airplane, owned by Barbara Smith, and were able to see a helicopter up close.

Amity Robotics engages hands-on learning

By: Craig Hudson, Robotics Coach & Reg McShane, Superintendent
Amity School District

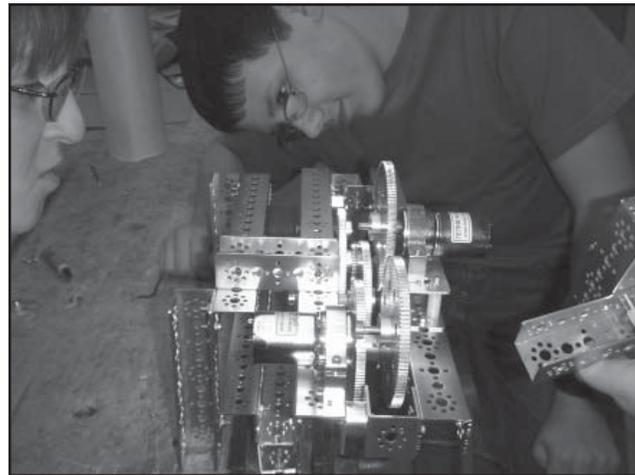
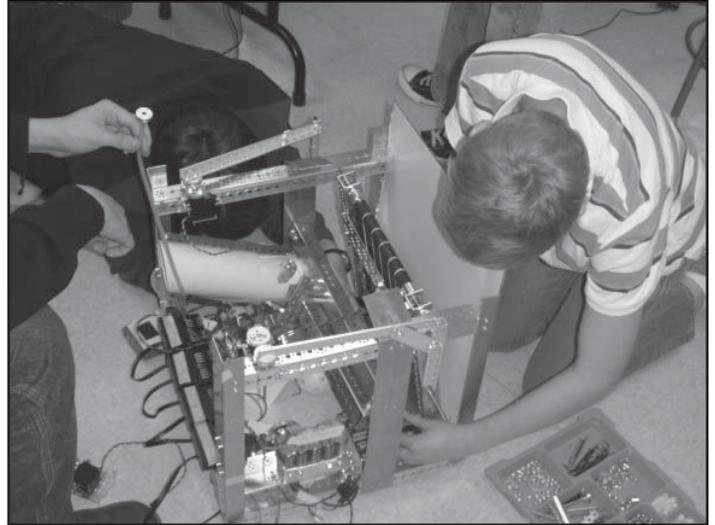
Can small schools leverage technology to challenge students and engage them to learn about math and science in a “hands-on,” interactive way? Amity School District has been a participant with FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) robotics for four years. The program started with six students and has grown to 14 from across the middle and high schools. The students design an 18”-tall robot to compete in a national challenge. Every year poses a different challenge, such as moving and scoring using softballs, rings or hockey pucks. This year, the students are making “wiffle balls fly.”

Amity Robotics has two teams, and both qualified for the State Championship, held in late February. Last year, the high school team went all the way to the National Championship in Atlanta, Georgia. These victories demonstrate the hard work, dedication, and talent coming from Oregon small schools as they compete against schools of all sizes across the state.

“It’s more than math and science,” said Amity Robotics Coach Craig Hudson. “Its life skills are like teamwork, balancing pros and cons and managing a schedule. These students are having fun and learning at the same time.”

The Robotics program is a great addition to extra-curricular programs in Amity. Superintendent Reg McShane has been a strong supporter of growing the Robotics program in Amity.

“I am excited about the experiences this program offers kids,” McShane said. “Robotics helps students see scientists and engineers as professionals they can and want to be. Student success is all about pride and involvement in our schools. Our robotics program has provided this opportunity to a very talented and motivated group of our students!”



This spring, Amity will start a Lego League Robotics program at Amity Elementary. Researchers have shown that only 20 percent of students going into middle school are interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers. Amity hopes robotics will provide these elementary students with a hands-on laboratory to keep their interests high in learning about the sciences.

ORTOP (Oregon Robotics Tournament and Outreach Program) is the driving force behind the Oregon program. Lego League Robotics can start at age 9 using the Lego Mindstorms kit. There are around 350 FIRST Lego League (FLL) robotics teams in Oregon. The next level is FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC), starting at age 14. Amity has been involved with FTC for the past four years. Currently, there are about 50 FTC teams in Oregon, mostly in Portland and the Willamette Valley.

Robotics immerses students in applied science, hands-on math and helps them to develop real-world engineering skills. Around \$9 million is available in college scholarship for students participating in

FIRST robotics. Oregon State University and the Oregon Institute of Technology both have \$6,000 scholarships available. Those interested in learning more can visit www.ORTOP.org.



Congressman Kurt Schrader visits Santiam Canyon

Oregon Congressman Kurt Schrader visited with Santiam Canyon High School students earlier this year to find out about their experiences working on summer work crews, which were funded by stimulus grants.

Umatilla students make Valentines for National Guard men & women

By: Brian Long, Vice Principal
McNary Heights Elementary, Umatilla



The McNary Heights Mustang Student Council sacrificed its own personal Friday afternoon to stay after-school and create Valentine Cards. Students made 150 cards to send to Oregon National Guard servicemen and women in Iraq. The Mustang Student Council at McNary Heights is made up of 4th and 5th grade students, and their first priority is community service. The students love to make people feel valued and important.

In the past two years, the Council has sponsored canned food drives for the local fire department, penny drives for St Jude's Children's Hospital, 50-cent Hat Drive for Agape House, Valentine cards for the elderly at the Links, Hands of Love Christmas Trees for children at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, and their most recent project was to give our troops a smile by giving them a Valentine while serving our country. Patriotic Valentines were fun to make, and hopefully will be well-received.

Corbett students begin 'Learning in Depth'

By: Bob Dunton, Superintendent
Corbett School District

Learning in Depth, a program developed by Kieran Egan and the Imaginative Education Research Group, is simplicity itself. Students are randomly assigned topics that have been vetted for appropriate richness to warrant years of study. They receive individual topics during their primary years and keep them through high school graduation. There are no assignments, no deadlines, and no pressure to produce. This is learning for the sake of learning. Students receive support and encouragement, a medal inscribed with the topic (for inspiration), and a "starter notebook" to help them organize their thinking.

The response to LiD has been enthusiastic from all quarters. Students repeatedly ask for more time to explore their topics and never pass up an opportunity to share what they have learned. Parents have been surprised at the energy that students have already put in their work. Some parents have even asked for topics for their older children.

What are the benefits of LiD? Students gain in-depth knowledge of some aspect of the world. They learn what it means to learn, what it means to be an expert. Students' imaginations and emotions are engaged in learning. They develop their organizational and research skills. LiD develops schools into hubs of knowledge on many topics. Occasional student expositions will provide an opportunity for community members to view the work of the school.



Former Douglas County educator commemorates former school sites

By: George Murdock, Superintendent
Douglas ESD

Historians would suggest there were once as many as 171 local school districts in Douglas County. Today, there are just 14.

While no one knows the exact site of every one of those 171 districts, Larry Moulton of Roseburg has probably seen all but a handful. That's because the former teacher and school administrator has taken it upon himself to commemorate most of the sites.



Larry Moulton cleans a sign denoting the site of the Millwood School in Douglas County. The school opened in 1881 and operated until 1947 when the students transferred to the Umpqua School. Contributed photo.

Moulton covers the 5,000 square miles of Douglas County in his aging pickup. Inside the canopy he carries shovels, rags, signposts, concrete and other tools in case repairs are needed. Mostly, it's a matter of checking the condition of the signs and doing a little cleaning. Sometimes he's traveling paved roads in some of the more populated areas. Other times, when he's in the hills outside Elkton and Loon Lake, on the side roads beyond Tiller and Days Creek, or elsewhere in more remote regions, he finds himself well off the beaten path.

As he goes about his rounds, he's like an encyclopedia of local history reeling off the names of early settlers, pointing out historic sites, and sharing stories of what life was like for the pioneers.

He keeps meticulous records of sign locations and conditions. His only real concern about the project is who will take his place. "I'll do this as long as I can he says, "I just hope there will be somebody else who will keep it going."

Moulton, who retired in 1998 from Winchester School, spent the first four years of his new found leisure time writing a book on the mills of Douglas County. "This was once the mill capital of America," says the author, "there were mills everywhere."

As he was searching for old mill sites, people would tell him "you know, there used to be a school here or a school there, you ought to make a note of that." And so he did. He wrote a second book detailing the site of the county's early schools and including bits of history.

Moulton approached Douglas County officials who agreed to print signs signifying the school sites and provide materials for putting them near former school sites. Most of the signs stand alone along the back roads of the county, but in some cases they are attached to current buildings which replaced earlier structures.

Several times a year, Moulton makes the rounds of the 160 signs which he has erected around the county making notes about their condition, cleaning those that are dirty, and doing repairs when necessary.

A cow knocked one sign over and drivers occasionally take a toll. Hunters do some damage as do vandals, but most of the signs are left intact as tributes to the dozens of pupils who inhabited the old schools.

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For a current list of district
vacancies log on to
www.oregonssa.org/vacancies

ARRA grant funds new Paisley School windows

The Paisley School District is the recipient of an Oregon Department of Energy grant. The City of Paisley submitted the application on behalf of the District to purchase new windows for the high school to replace some that are approximately 50 years old. The grant, for \$270,000, is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, under the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Formula Block Grant.

"The school is a central part of our community, where wedding, funerals, and many community events have been hosted," said Mary Cramer, district business manager. "It is a great example of how schools in small communities are such an integral part of everyone's lives."



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games, BINGO and giveaways. Twenty-seven sponsors generated five Traeger Barbeque giveaways. The idea for this event was formulated around nine years ago by a group of local folks who truly value education and wanted to make that experience continue for students who attend Santiam High School. Over the past nine years, the banquet has grown and last year's banquet netted \$27,000. That money went to assist Santiam High School seniors in the form of college tuitions.

Over the last nine years, \$194,063 has been raised and 102 students have received assistance to further their educations from the proceeds from this banquet. Individual scholarship award amounts are determined through a point process, in which students generate points through grades, essays, staff recommendations, community recommendations, progress towards their CIMs and an interview. Dollar values are assigned to each point, depending on how well each year's banquet does and scholarship amounts are calculated. During most years, scholarships range from \$2,000 to \$3,000. Scholarships may be used towards any form of post-high school education, from beauty or other trades schools to Harvard. The goal each year is to have a great time and keep in mind where and what the funds raised that night can mean to high school seniors wanting to extend their educations.

This is another example of the support and caring that occurs in Oregon small schools. Congratulations to Brad and Santiam Canyon School District.