



OUTLOOK

THE SOUTH ORANGE-MAPLEWOOD EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Newsletter, Fall 2003

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



SOMEF is on the move, and we need your support to help us keep pace. A devoted Board, outstanding educators and residents, and our new Executive Director, Deborah Prinz, have helped the Foundation to make great

strides in achieving educational excellence for all children of the South Orange/Maplewood schools.

In the four years since SOMEF was revitalized, our scope has broadened beyond expectations. This fall we received over 80 mini- and large grant applications from 118 staff members, totaling \$93,000, compared with only 3 applications in 1999! Clearly our teachers are committed to bringing their enthusiasm and creativity to our students. Our imperative is to raise substantial funds to meet the ever-growing demand.

In August, SOMEF became the home for the Michelle T. Riecke Teaching Fellowship Fund. Out of the tragedy of losing a valued member of our community has come an idea that will carry on her passion for education. Already exceeding \$100,000, this endowment fund will be used to finance staff development for many years to come.

Continuing to help struggling students reach their potential, the ACHIEVE Volunteer Tutor Program expanded this year with the creation of the Jefferson Elementary School Homework Club. Funded in part by Burgdorff Realtors (Maplewood) and the Jefferson PTA, tutors will help over 90 young learners develop good homework habits this year.

SOMEF is continuously being approached with creative ideas for new initiatives. Success and innovation seem to spawn ever more growth. Make a donation to SOMEF today to enable us to provide for these increasing opportunities. Visit our website and become familiar with the kinds of programs that your dollars can or already do support. Give as generously as you can...it's a donation that will reward all of us!

Thea Okin

BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

Freshman year in high school. Words that can still make adults cringe.

Since the transition from middle school to high school is often challenging at best, SOMEF helped 14 vulnerable students get a leg up by funding Columbia High School's new Bridge to Success program this past summer. The orientation program, developed by Principal Renee Pollack, featured transitional math and language arts coursework, and a combination of leadership and team-building exercises. The goal? To encourage positive behavior and foster academic achievement.

Freshmen Al-Basim Wrazz, Stephanie St. Louis, Patricia St. Armand, Chioma Enworom and Verline Ulysses were among the students who volunteered for the program and/or were recommended by their middle school principals. Now that the fall semester is underway, *Outlook* sat down with the Bridge to Success teens to find out what they had to say about the program.

"When school started, I didn't even get lost," laughed Patricia St. Armand. Sarah Mazak, a 9th grade guidance counselor, said that the importance of this statement shouldn't be underestimated. "The high school is quite large," said Mazak. "If the kids are physically comfortable, and have an easier time finding their way, it helps their transition tremendously. They have an advantage over other students. It gives them confidence because they can show others how to navigate the building."

"I met some new friends through the people in the program," said Chioma Enworom. She felt that the relationships she made over the summer

allowed her to meet and mix with kids she might not have gotten to know. This blending of two middle school populations helps create the sense of one cohesive freshman class.

Verline felt that learning about the school's code of conduct, and getting to know the rules, was very helpful. The expectations for a high school student can be quite daunting, but she knew what to expect and whom to reach out to for help. Notably, all of the students said that they would recommend the program to a younger sibling.

"At this time, we feel that the program helped us meet some critical goals. The Bridge to Success students are conducting themselves appropriately in their new environment," said Sarah Mazak. In addition to their studies, the freshmen are starting to get involved in extra curricular activities such as the volunteer group Kids For Kids, the Diamante dance group, and sports programs.

"If we can help at-risk students ease into their adjustment even slightly," continued Mazak, "we're giving them a great advantage."



A few of the participants in Bridge to Success (Standing) Al-Basim Wrazz, Chioma Enworom, Verline Ulysses (seated) Stephanie St. Louis, Patricia St. Armand

VISIT SOMEF'S WEBSITE: WWW.SOMEF.ORG

DEBORAH PRINZ NAMED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SOUTH ORANGE-MAPLEWOOD EDUCATION FOUNDATION

The South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation (SOMEF) has appointed Deborah Prinz as its Executive Director. Ms. Prinz, a South Orange resident since 1992, established the Foundation's ACHIEVE Volunteer Tutor Program in 1997 and has been its coordinator since that time. She holds a master's degree in education from Columbia University Teachers College, is a past president of the South Orange Middle School Home and School Association and has worked as a mental health counselor for over 25 years. As Executive Director of SOMEF, Ms. Prinz will work closely with the organization's volunteer board of trustees to supervise both its grant-making and fundraising initiatives.

"Deborah is a committed leader who is known for her hands-on approach," said Thea Okin, President of the Board of Trustees, South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation. "As a parent and a neighbor, Deborah understands that a strong partnership between

our schools and our community is essential."

South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education President, Mila Jasey concurs: "Deborah has worked on programs to benefit the children of this district for many years, as an active member of PTA and HSA, and as co-president with me at South Orange Middle School. The ACHIEVE Program is a stellar example of her understanding of what students and teachers need as well as what the community has the capacity to provide." Ms. Jasey continued, "I am so pleased that Deborah was named Executive Director of the South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation and will now bring this dedication, understanding and commitment to an organization that makes such an important contribution to this school district."

"My hope is that the work of the South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation helps students and parents increase their sense of pride in our schools," said Ms.



Deborah Prinz, SOMEF's recently-appointed Executive Director

Prinz. "By working together, we can offer our children the educational advantages they deserve, and help ensure that teachers' ideas, enthusiasm and professional development are well-supported and well-funded." In addition to her new responsibilities as SOMEF Executive Director, Prinz will continue to coordinate ACHIEVE.

DONATIONS TO THE RIECKE TEACHING FELLOWSHIP TOP \$103,000

Thanks to the many generous community members who share in the values held dear by the late Shelley Riecke, former president of the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education, SOMEF's Michele T. Riecke Teaching Fellowship fund will provide annual grants to deserving teachers for many years to come.

Each year, Riecke Fellows will be afforded the opportunity to participate in a summer professional development experience of their own choosing, one that will lead to improvements in practice, curriculum, and student achievement. Applicants may request up to \$3,000 for an individual teacher and up to \$5,000 for a team of two or more teachers. Recipients of a Riecke Fellowship will be required to exercise professional leadership by bringing back their newly acquired knowledge to share with their colleagues.

The South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation is pleased to assist in this program that honors the memory of a beloved friend and community leader who dedicated herself to maintaining and improving the quality of instruction in our school district.

The first Fellowship will be announced on April 23, 2004.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

February 29, 2004	Harlem Wizards Fundraiser
May 15, 2004	Very Senior Prom
May 2004	Honor Your Teacher Campaign
June 2004	Barnes & Noble Book Sale

LEAP INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH ONE SLAMMIN' SHOW TO BENEFIT SOMEF

COME SEE YOUR FRIENDS AND DISTRICT TEACHERS PLAY AGAINST THE FAMOUS



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2004
DOORS OPEN AT 4 PM
SOUTH ORANGE MIDDLE SCHOOL GYM

SPOTLIGHT ON MINI-GRANTS

MINI-GRANT: KNITTING TOGETHER A COMMUNITY

Judith Symonds, an instructional aide at Seth Boyden, and recipient of a SOMEF mini-grant, was recently named *Knitter Magazine's* Knitter of the Year.

Knitting, once simply a lunchtime pursuit for Symonds, has now become nothing short of an obsession for students and staff alike at Seth Boyden. In the spring of 2003, with the support of a \$500 mini-grant from SOMEF, Judith launched a program entitled "Knitting Together a Community." Her goal was to encourage listening skills, hand-eye coordination, math skills, and self-esteem through knitting. The process of knitting requires patience, persistence and self-control – valuable life skills as well. Judith's intuition told her that a common interest would help foster a sense of community among the students, regardless of age, gender and academic skill. She was right.

The program began with a small group of at-risk students, and quickly expanded to include over 70 children. It was an entirely kid-driven phenomenon. Colorful bookmarks, scarves, belts, Beanie Baby clothes, and headbands filled the classrooms and accessorized the young apprentices. While the students helped teach one another the essential skills, Judith enthusiastically trained parents and staff -- even Principal Kristopher Harrison and the school custodian gave it a whirl.

When the students returned to school this September, they were clamoring to knit again. This year, Judith hopes to teach her students how to spin yarn, and how to grow plants in the school's garden to create dye for their yarn.

"We chose Judith [as Knitter of the Year] because she is sharing knitting with the community," said Rick Mondragon, editor of *Knitter Magazine*. "The knitted items [the children make] surely have their place and time, but her instruction reaches far beyond the parameters of the school community and will certainly extend well beyond her lifetime. She is adding richness to the children's lives and personalities, instilling something that can never be taken away."

MINI-GRANT: FOR THE LOVE OF POETRY

Third grade students in Meta Johnson's and Donna DelGuercio's classes at Clinton Elementary School delighted their parents and siblings with a poetry festival, thanks to a mini-grant funded by SOMEF. Throughout the year, students learned about various forms of poetry, including cinquain, haiku, limerick, alphabet and sense. Mrs. Johnson and Ms. DelGuercio then assisted their budding poets in assembling their favorite works into a beautifully illustrated (by the poets!) bound volume.



The mini-grant, entitled "For the Love of Poetry", was used to purchase special paper and markers that the students used to create their books. Mrs. Johnson noted that the project helped students from every ability level to improve their language arts skills. One student in the ESL program spoke no English at the start of the school year and was able to converse with classmates by the end of the year. The teachers attribute much of his progress in reading to the poetry project.

At the year-end celebration party for "For the Love of Poetry", each student read a favorite poem from his or her own book. The poetry reading was a marvelous final stanza of a wonderful year of immersion into the joys of poetry for the students.

ACHIEVE BUILDS CHARACTER IN YOUNG TUTORS

In the 2002-03 school year, a record 125 students from Columbia and other area high schools signed up to serve as ACHIEVE Volunteer Tutors. The establishment of the Jefferson Elementary School Homework Club has attracted an additional 35 tutors who are in 8th grade. For these young volunteers, ACHIEVE represents an opportunity to reinforce their own knowledge and develop self-esteem, while serving as positive role models for younger students or their peers. Recognizing the value of ACHIEVE as an extra-curricular activity, the Columbia High School Cougar Booster Club made a grant to SOMEF to purchase materials for high school volunteers to use in their work as tutors. Educational games, instructional aids, tutoring manuals and other supplies will now be available at every tutoring site to make the most of the experience for tutors and students alike. It's not too late for teens or adults to sign up for ACHIEVE this year. Contact Deborah Prinz at 973-378-9637 or dprinz@somsd.k12.nj.us.



P.O. Box 84
Maplewood, NJ 07040

BREAKING NEWS:
Your dollars will be DOUBLED
if you donate to SOMEF now!
Donations received by Dec. 31, 2003
will be matched
thanks to a generous "challenge"
from a group of friends of SOMEF!

**THIS FALL OUR MAILBOX WAS INUNDATED WITH GRANT APPLICATIONS
FROM 118 TEACHERS AND STAFF, TOTALING \$93,000!
PLEASE CONTRIBUTE GENEROUSLY SO THAT WE CAN FUND THESE
AND FUTURE GRANTS IN THE ARTS, TECHNOLOGY, ATHLETICS AND MORE.**

I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to the
South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation (SOMEF):

- \$500.00 \$100.00 \$25.00
\$250.00 \$50.00 Other: \$ _____

Please make checks payable to: South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation
Mail to: P.O. Box 84, Maplewood, NJ 07040
For more information please call 973-378-2055

Name _____
Address _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____
e-mail _____



*All gifts are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.
The South Orange-Maplewood Education Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit incorporated in the State of New Jersey.*

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