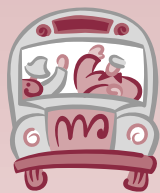


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focus

Preparing World Class Citizens

November, 2009



Sand Creek Middle School teacher, Cathy Vigars, was one of two South Colonie educators surprised by OfficeMax this fall in its "A Day Made Better" initiative. Veeder Elementary School art teacher, Tony Jesmain, was also honored.

District to kick off annual Stuff the Bus with Toys for Tots campaign

For the third straight year, Santa's sleigh will be colored yellow this holiday season, thanks to the efforts of the South Colonie Central School District family.

District employees, students and their families are teaming up once again with the U.S. Marine Corps to continue its unique campaign to "Stuff the Bus" with Toys for Tots.

Toys For Tots, sponsored by the Marine Corps since 1947, annually provides some 60,000 Capital District children with toys for the holidays. New, unwrapped toys are collected at various locations in November and December, and distributed to needy youngsters in time for the holidays.

There are two major phases to the Stuff The Bus campaign:

- **Public Phase — Friday, November 27:** "Black Friday" marks one of the major kickoffs to the campaign. South Colonie school buses will be parked at Northway Mall outside the Jo-Ann Fabrics store, and at the Kohl's Plaza on Central Avenue. Volunteers will be collecting new, unwrapped toys from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Teachers honored in 'A Day Made Better' OfficeMax initiative

Make surprise visits at Veeder and Sand Creek

Two South Colonie teachers were selected by local OfficeMax stores this fall as winners in the company's "A Day Made Better" national educator recognition event.

Cathy Vigars of Sand Creek Middle School and Tony Jesmain of Veeder Elementary School were two of 1,000 teachers across the country surprised on October 6th with a big orange box of office supplies for their schools. OfficeMax representatives secretly arrived early in the morning and presented Vigars, a Teaching Assistant in the Math lab, and Jesmain, a Veeder art teacher, with the \$1,000 worth of supplies. About \$1 million in OfficeMax supplies were

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... OfficeMax

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donated by OfficeMax to teachers nationwide this year.

Vigars was nominated for this recognition, said Sand Creek Principal David Perry, "because she is the jack of all trades. She always comes to work on time with a positive attitude that is infectious. Her smile, sense of humor and dedication makes a positive impact on the lives of students."

Jesmain was nominated for this recognition, said Veeder Principal Kathleen Gottschalk, for going above and beyond for his students. Every spring, Jesmain almost single handedly organizes the school art show, meticulously displaying every piece of art on the walls. He often stays after school to help students complete their art work.

"Tony is perhaps the most talented and dedicated elementary art teacher that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting," Gottschalk said. "He consistently brings out the artistic talent in all children that he works with. He is patient and encouraging; every child benefits dramatically from being instructed by Mr. Jesmain."

The "A Day Made Better" surprise in-school ceremonies were part of the office supply retailer's



Tony Jesmain

campaign to eliminate teacher-funded classrooms, especially in this time of extra economic burden on school districts across the nation. According to studies conducted by the National Education Association, teachers spend nearly \$1,200 out of their pockets each year for basic classroom supplies.



Lisha Kill School unveils 'compassion' mural

A 10-month project came to fruition this fall as Lisha Kill Middle School unveiled its long awaited "compassion" mural for all to see.

The wall-sized, colorful tile mural now greets visitors in the school lobby. The project dates back to December, 2008, when the school's Action Committee (A/C) decided to create the mural as part of its efforts to promote character education. Compassion was chosen as the mural's theme.

Last school year, the committee asked each student, staff member, administrator, community member, etc., to contribute to the mural by designing their own individual tiles, each of which would be a mere piece of one big picture in the end. The final product was to visually represent what compassion means to the Lisha Kill's school community.

To prepare students for this massive project, the A/C led mini-lessons during lunch periods discussing compassion: asking them to identify Compassion in their lives and brainstorm ways to make it more prevalent from that moment forward. The culminating activity of the week was to sketch out how compassion looked to them in their minds. All the drawings were evaluated by the committee and seventh grader, Jackie Malecki's drawing was chosen for the mural's final design.

Led by art teacher Christina Norris, mural construction began last February, with the school dedicating a week to the project, learning about compassion in their classrooms and through school activities.

The end of the week was tile day. Students began the process by sketching their pictures or quotes onto a 4 X 4 tile donated by Best Tile of Colonie, owned by Brian Ford. Then, using one color assigned to their homerooms, they outlined, shaded and colored their designs with crayon and colored pencil. Finally, they used watercolor paints to shade the whole tile, leaving them with a monochromatic piece: from far away, the tile appears to be one color, but the closer one comes up to it, the easier it is to see the actual design popping out.

Newest Success Maker program captivates 'techno' students in their learning

District saves about \$72,000 on software costs

In this age of Ipods, Facebook, emailing and texting, engaging today's "techno" students in learning is critical to their success. Introducing South Colonie's latest gadget — the newest version of Success Maker.

Success Maker is a computer software program which provides individualized, self-paced instruction for each student in reading and math. With the touch of a mouse in the computer lab, students become visual learners as they improve their reading and math skills by manipulating images, cartoon figures, shapes, charts, graphs, pictures, words and more. Audio sounds played over headphones add to the effect.

"It certainly has captivated our children," said Jack Adams, South Colonie Director of Information Technology. "These students are today's 'digital natives.' They are computer savvy to say the least. With this newest software, they enjoy learning to the point that they take it and run with it. Every day they are ready to explore."

When it comes to Computer Assisted Instruction, South Colonie has been ahead of most districts, introducing this type of technology to its students back in the early 1980's. But this 21st century version of CAI — the newest Success Maker — is so dynamic and user-friendly it has captured the excitement of today's learners like no other program. It was introduced at Lisha Kill and Sand Creek Middle Schools last spring when the program's parent company — Pearson Education, Inc. — began pilot testing it in the district. The company provided the two schools with 30 free licenses each, saving the district about \$72,000. This year, the new Success Maker has become an integral part of instruction in grades 5-8.

One of the key educational components of the new Success Maker is its built-in tracking software. After a student completes a series of questions in reading or math, Success Maker places that student at the appropriate learning level based on performance.

After this initial placement, the Management System tracks a student's progress and automatically provides the level of instruction appropriate to that student's needs, offering additional practice sessions in areas where performance is weak. Because each student proceeds at his or her own pace, this allows the student to take on greater academic challenges while building new skills, knowledge and strategies.

Success Maker takes the guess work out of teaching. On any given day, teachers call pull up reports that show what each child worked on during a class and how he or she performed. If weaknesses are detected, teachers work one-on-one with the child to correct the problem.



A screen view of what students see.



The newest Success Maker software is being used in South Colonie's middle school computer labs to engage students — encouraging them to improve on their reading and math skills.

Stuff the Bus

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• **School Phase — November 30 — December 8:** Each of the district's five elementary schools and two middle schools will designate one day during this week for students to celebrate the Stuff the Bus campaign during their Morning Programs or at other times. Collection boxes will also be stationed at Colonie High School during that time.



The celebration days are: **Monday, November 30** — Forest Park School, **Tuesday, December 1** — Veeder School, **Wednesday, December 2** — Shaker Road School, **Thursday, December 3** — Roesleville School, **Friday, December 4** — Saddlewood School, **Monday, December 7** — Lisha Kill School and **Tuesday, December 8** — Sand Creek School.

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Residents pass new school bus proposition



South Colonie residents went to the polls in October and passed the annual school bus proposition to upgrade the district Transportation Department by a vote of 728-389. The district was seeking voter approval to spend \$629,000 to purchase seven new transportation vehicles to meet the district's annual replacement schedule. This included: five, 66-passenger school buses; one, 12-passenger/two-wheelchair school bus; and one, 20-passenger Type A van transportation vehicle.

NYSPRA honors school communications effort

South Colonie has been recognized for outstanding achievement in educational communications by the New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA). The district earned three Awards of Merit in 2009 for: design and production of the 2008-09 school district calendar, an extensive communications campaign surrounding South Colonie's new 2009 full day kindergarten program and for a year-long information campaign on the 2009-10 district budget.

Red Cross award

The South Colonie Teachers Association has earned the 2008-2009 Blood Drive Sponsor of the Year Award from the American Red Cross. SCTA was one of only five recipients from the New York/Pennsylvania area out of 1,000 nominees.



Shaker Road students shake up their reading

Shaker Road Elementary School students joined their families and school staff in celebrating the kickoff for the 2009 Parents As Reading Partners (PARP) program.

Students enjoyed "shaking up" their own homemade ice cream while browsing the book fair and playing other games. The theme for this year's PARP program, sponsored by the school PTA, is "You Scream, Ice Cream, We All Scream for Reading!" During the next several weeks, students and their parents will keep track of their nightly reading efforts and provide some very impressive statistics about how much reading goes on.