



THE EXCHANGE

www.blindbrook.org

WINTER 2007

SPOTLIGHT ON KAREN BRONSON, NEW PRINCIPAL AT BBMS

The months are flying by like calendar pages in an old movie, and it's hard to believe that I have been here at Blind Brook Middle School as Principal on Assignment for almost half a school year.

First, I would like to thank all members of the Blind Brook community for making me feel so welcomed during my transition. Everyone, from Dr. Valenti, the Board, and my administrative colleagues to teachers, staff, and especially students, has been warm and supportive as I learn all I can about this outstanding school district. However, I have to express special gratitude to Dr. Thomas Wolf. His experience, wisdom and support have been a rare gift to a new principal. We have made an excellent team, and I will miss his insight and perspective when he retires in February. Thank you, Dr. Wolf.

As you may know, I grew up in Westchester County but have worked and raised a family upstate for many years. My son Brendan and daughter Kate are my proudest achievements. The hard-won perspective and understanding gained as a parent watching children grow and meet their own challenges is intrinsic to my administrative style. As a teacher of English and administrator in Shenendehowa Central Schools in Clifton Park, New York, I gained a deep knowledge and understanding of the classroom and the workings of an excellent suburban district of over 10,000 students. Many of the goals there focused on the need to bring a big place down to scale and create smaller and more personalized learning environments for students. Here in Blind Brook, that strong sense of community and personalized school environment is a fact of life. In fact, giving students an opportunity to "re-invent" themselves, as young people need to do periodically, is a

contrasting challenge. A strong and dedicated faculty and staff, involved and aware parents, and strong expectations for student performance combine to make high achievement and success a reality that is within reach for all of our students. I've



been fortunate to come to Blind Brook where these essential components are in place.

So where do we go from here? How does an excellent middle school continue to

"Here in Blind Brook, that strong sense of community and personalized school environment is a fact of life."

strive for that balance of academic rigor and developmental appropriateness that is essential for young adolescents? As principal, there are several goals which I see as intrinsic to our continued progress:

• **Enhancing our middle school identity.** One way to do this is by exploring a sched-

uling format which provides for an appropriate transition between an elementary schedule and the departmentalized specialized instruction of a high school. Teaming, exploratory options and an integrated curriculum are cornerstones of an exemplary middle school. Efforts are currently underway to look at realistic ways to fashion a schedule which offers more instructional time for students, as well as more opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers. With shared staff, new schedule changes create a complex puzzle, but it is one worth working on in conjunction with the high school to provide the best possible opportunities for our students.

• **Keeping the focus on continuous improvement in instruction and achievement.** Our district's existing commitment to ongoing high quality professional development means that the critical piece for creation and growth of a true professional learning community is already in place. These opportunities, coupled with the current recognition of the importance of data to inform instruction, give us a framework for academic goal-setting.

• **Building on our use of technology and instruction to teach and communicate.** Keeping parents and students aware of assignments on the web and using the SmartBoard as a way to infuse a lesson with interactivity and a virtual world of resources are just two ways we can continue to build a strong learning community through technology. Seeing the benefit and excitement of these advances is enough to make an administrator pine for the classroom again. I hope to ensure that more and more of our teachers make use of these technological tools.

(continued on page 2)

Blind Brook-Rye Union Free School District
390 North Ridge Street
Rye Brook, New York 10573-1204
(914)937-3600

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SPOTLIGHT ON KAREN BRONSON (continued)

• **Implementing new activities and opportunities for middle school students and families.** Our first parent/student book talk for sixth grade occurred in October, and upcoming evenings will give seventh and eighth grade parents a chance to talk together about a book they have read. A Spring showcase of student work and talent and a breakfast conversation between middle school students and Board of Education members is planned for the spring. Working with Project Prevention to plan Spirit Night and other terrific activities for our middle school students has been productive, as has planning our first

evening spelling bee, which will be sponsored by PTA in the spring.

Perhaps most important of all is the goal of all of our teachers and staff here in the middle school to create and maintain an environment and atmosphere day in and day out where students feel known and supported. Seeing students enter the building in the morning with smiles and hearing that they feel good about coming here every day is a great feeling. I have felt that here in BBMS since I arrived. It happens because everyone--teachers, administrators, support staff, secretaries, custodians,

drivers and all other members of our school community--care so much about students and put their learning and well-being at the center of their efforts every day.

This is an exciting time to begin as the Principal of Blind Brook Middle School. It is a time of growth and expansion, certainly in terms of our projected enrollment and beautiful new facility as well as in terms of our shared vision for all of our children. I am looking forward to getting to know you as we work together to move forward to ensure the best possible experience for our middle school students.



When you see 24 what do you think of?

- If you said, "2 x 12," you would be right.
- If you said, "20 + 4," you would be right.
- If you said, "50 - 26," you would be right.
- If you said, "24 hours in a day," you would be right.
- If you said, "2 dimes and 4 pennies," you would be right.
- If you drew 24 lines you would be right.
- If you said, "30-5"...well, you might need a little more practice.

Students at Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School have been immersed in the *Everyday Mathematics* program since the beginning of the school year. A primary objective of the curriculum is to bring mathematical literacy to the students at Ridge Street. The researchers and developers of the *Everyday Mathematics* program define mathematical literacy as "the range of sophisticated mathematical knowledge and skills that extends far beyond basic calculation skills." Our goal this year has been to start our students on this path of mathematical literacy and have them question what they already know and what they need to know in order to become lifelong problem solvers.

Rarely has there been a time this year when a teacher hasn't stopped me in the hallway and told me about the fantastic and unbelievable thinking that has been going on their classrooms. They are truly

Math Literacy at Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School

impressed with how students are not only finding efficient ways to solve problems, but how they are reasoning out their solutions.

While the *Everyday Mathematics* program may be different from the way most of us were taught in school, no one can dispute the engaging, interactive, and hands-on experience that we are providing our students. They have the opportunity to work in partnerships or groups and are encouraged to explain and discuss their mathematical thinking with each other. The curriculum provides teachers with different ways for students to practice basic skills, not only with a mental math session in every lesson, but through game-playing as well.



Mike Thomas, 5th grade math teacher and students

A key element to the successful implementation of the *Everyday Mathematics* program is scheduling regular staff development opportunities. We are fortunate to have both George Balzer and Eleanore Livesey working with our teachers.

Mr. Balzer is a retired educator from Pennsylvania with thirty-four years of experience as an elementary classroom teacher and principal, and long-standing expertise in *Everyday Mathematics*. He has been working with our teachers on the lesson design practices of the *Everyday Mathematics* and implementation of the program. Ms. Livesey, a math consultant from BOCES who has had many years of experience in the New York State Education Department, has been working with teachers on the direct correlation between the mathematics standards and the *Everyday Mathematics* program. These sessions have allowed our teachers to understand and apply the philosophies, theories, and practices of *Everyday Mathematics*. In addition, our teachers have been working with Kathy Conley, a data consultant, who has analyzed the results of the New York State Mathematics Exams and how the results can inform our instruction.

We are taking a comprehensive and professional approach to the implementation of this new mathematics program. With a highly dedicated and talented staff already in place, we will make great strides his year. As my dear friend and mentor said to me, "Great minds do NOT think alike" and that is exactly what we want from everyone this year - to look at problems with a different perspective because you might just find another way to solve it!

Tracy Taylor
Assistant Principal
Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School

BLIND BROOK READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The New Year of 2007 should prompt some original thinking on traditional ideas.

For the past few years, I have been urging our school community to envision the world of tomorrow into which today's students will be entering.

We are preparing a new generation of "global citizens" who more than ever before must be able to create a society well beyond the boundaries of Rye Brook's 10573 zip code. This year's entering Kindergarten class will be graduating in 2020 – a year in which more than half of today's careers and jobs will be transformed into new challenges and opportunities not yet invented.

21st Century Challenges

Time Magazine's December 18th issue asked "Are our students prepared for the 21st century?" *Time* tells us about a dark little joke exchanged among some educators.

"Rip Van Winkle awakens in the 21st century after a hundred-year snooze and is, of course, utterly bewildered by what he sees. Men and women dash about, talking to small metal devices pinned to their ears. Young people sit at home on sofas, moving miniature athletes around on electronic screens. Older folk defy death and disability with metronomes in their chests and with hips made of metal and plastic. Airports, hospitals, shopping malls –every place Rip goes just baffles him. But when he finally walks into a schoolroom, the old man knows exactly where he is. "This is a school," he declares. "We used to have these back in 1906. Only now the blackboards are green."

Blind Brook is 21st century ready.

Well, Rip certainly wasn't entering Blind Brook. We've left our black and green chalkboards in the last century and now have computer-based white Smart Boards in 70 % of our classrooms. Within the near future 100% of our classrooms will have Smart Boards.

Rip would also be bewildered with our advancing technology of Web sites, e-mail, telecommunication with parents, stu-

dents and faculty. Mr. Van Winkle would be equally flummoxed by our modernized science labs and library media centers.

And lastly, if old Rip sat in on our Middle States Evaluation meetings he'd be hard pressed to keep pace with our plans to build better educational programs for tomorrow's students. Rip would also be baffled if he attended any of our Global Language Task Force meetings where we are reaching beyond the Euro-centric borders of the Romance tongues into the new age of world languages.

Some Final Thoughts

In this issue, we've noted the "Educational Presentations" for 2007 school board meetings and listed the "2007-2008 Budget Timetable". If you want to be a player in building tomorrow's schools, mark your calendar now!

Best wishes to you and your loved ones in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Ronald D. Valenti, Ph.D

2007-2008 BUDGET – KEY DATES

Monday, February 26, 2007

Superintendent's Proposed 2007-2008 Budget Presentation
BBHS Auditorium 8:00 p.m.

Monday, March 12, 2007

Budget Discussion:
Administrative/Capital Budgets
BBHS Library at 8:00 p.m.

Monday, March 26, 2007 *

Budget Discussion: Elementary School Programs & Curriculum, Instruction & Technology Initiatives for 2007-2008
BBHS Library 8:00 p.m.

Monday, April 9, 2007 *

Budget Discussion: Middle/High School & Guidance Programs for 2007-2008
BBHS Library 8:00 p.m.

Monday, April 16, 2007 *

Budget Discussion: Pupil Services & Athletic Programs for 2007-2008
BBHS Library 8:00 p.m.
Adoption of 2007-2008 Budget & Tax Report Card

Tuesday, May 1, 2007

Voter Registration
2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
District Clerk's Office

Wednesday, May 2, 2007

Meet the Candidate's Night (if contested election) BBHS Auditorium 8:00 p.m.

Monday, May 7, 2007

Public Budget Hearing:
Summary of 2007-2008 Budget
BBHS Library 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday, May 9, 2007

Voter Registration
4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
District Clerk's Office

Tuesday, May 15, 2007

2007-2008 Budget Vote & Board Election
PRSS Old Gymnasium
7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

* *Directors and Principals will present their budget initiatives at these meetings.*



IMPORTANT VOTER INFORMATION

Voter Qualifications

A person shall be entitled to vote at any school meeting for the school budget, election of school district officers and upon all other matters which may be brought before such meeting who is:

1. a citizen of the United States;
2. eighteen years of age or older;
3. a resident within the district for a period of thirty days preceding the meeting at which he/she offers to vote; and
4. registered to vote.

Absentee Ballots

Absentee Ballots may be obtained by contacting the District Clerk's office at 937-3600 ext. 3032 after April 1, 2007.



Farewell to Our Founding Principal, Dr. Tom Wolf

As the first Principal of the Blind Brook Middle School, Dr. Wolf made our school into what it is today.

Blind Brook will always remember him as:

The father of our Middle School and “grandfather” to the students;
A uniting force genuinely interested in fostering the best in everyone;
Wonderful, caring, supportive, warm and approachable – always there for students, faculty, staff and fellow administrators;

Understanding the Middle School child – and what a Middle School is and should be;

A great intellect, a wonderful mentor;

A gentle man, a gentleman;

An enduring presence and permanent part of Blind Brook’s history.

Thank you, Dr. Wolf!

HOUSE PROUD - Great achievements and news about our students

Students of all grades, along with friends and family members, participated in a fundraiser led by an organization called “Raising The Roof”, which helps gather funds to build homes for people around the world who are in need. Students viewed a PowerPoint presentation about needy children around the world and then helped raise money for their families.

Second graders at BMP-Ridge Street School helped less-fortunate children in many ways this holiday season. They made cards for the children at the Andrus School and collected gifts to donate to the Toys for Tots Foundation. During the month of January the students will make snowflakes and send them to Blythedale Children’s Hospital.

The members of the **BMP-Ridge Street School Fifth Grade Student Council** provided holiday treats for our Rye Brook Police Officers and Fire Fighters. Teachers, Mrs. Fisher and Ms. Blumstein delivered a trunk filled with delicious looking, homemade goodies to the Rye Brook Police and Fire Departments.

Congratulations to **Middle School sixth grade students** Sarah Ackerman, Samantha Colby, Melanie Greenwald and Tami Kadmon. They have been selected to participate in the March 17th Westchester All-County Elementary Chorus at Purchase College.

The **Middle School Community Service Club** held a soup drive to collect cans of chicken soup for the soup kitchen. Over 500 cans of chicken soup were collected in time for the Thanksgiving Holidays. During the months of January and February they will collect new hats, scarves, and gloves for the needy and put together travel size personal care items to give to the homeless.

The **Middle School Student Government** sponsored a Pajama Day during Spirit Week to help raise over \$600 to contribute towards AIDS awareness.

Early in December the **Blind Brook Music Department** presented its annual Elementary, Middle/High School Holiday Choral Concert. They also gave a beautiful performance to the Port Chester/Rye Rotary Club.

The French Club sang holiday carols in French to Kindergartners, first and second graders at RSS in December.

The **High School Peer Leadership Program** held a Family Night in late November. Thirteen peer leaders hosted over thirty freshman students and parents in a series of activities designed to help explore teen-parent communication.

Latin I and II classes held their second annual Saturnalia Toga Festival in

December. All who attended enjoyed culinary specialties, art displays and great performances.

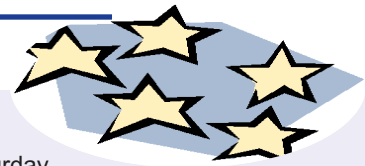
Blind Brook High School students sponsored the Annual Can Food Drive for the Carver Center in Port Chester. Over 700 cans of food were collected in time to help families in need celebrate Thanksgiving.

On the first of December, four **Blind Brook High School Mock Trial Team** members and Mr. Greshes, Mock Trial Team advisor, attended the Harvard/Yale/Princeton debates at Byram Hills High School in Armonk. The debate, which was won by Princeton, was about the appropriate strategy for the conduct of the Iraqi War. After the first debate, select high school students, among them one of our own, Nathan Cohn, were chosen to participate in a second debate. The high school students were paired with one of the college students to debate reinstating the military draft. It was a highly spirited session and Mr. Cohn performed exceedingly well. The Blind Brook students in attendance were, Ethan Klapper, George Levine and Dicksha Nagia.

Congratulations, **Bryan Silverman**, eighth grade student of Mrs. Rodriguez, for winning first place in the American Mathematical Contest sponsored by the Mathematical Association of America.



CREATIVE ADVENTURE



Destination

Imagination

is a worldwide creative problem-solving competition for children whose mission is to foster the development of creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Since the Blind Brook school district first became involved in this program, we have come a long way. We have twelve teams this year!

Since September, teams of five to seven students have been meeting weekly to work together to solve this year's *Destination Imagination* main challenge. All teams have a choice of challenge problems. However, their solutions vary due to age grouping, innovation and imagination. The students have been practicing creative, instantaneous and improvisational problem-solving through teamwork. This team experience is designed to allow the students to learn to grow by teaching and supporting one another and by drawing

upon and further developing their own instinctive talents. Each student has a chance to bring his or her own good ideas to the solution or table. The rules provided by the *Destination Imagination* headquarters are quite strict and very detailed. There is one rule regarding participation that everyone should be aware of: the only people allowed to work on solving the problem are the team members themselves. Team members may not receive any help (in the form of ideas, suggestions, construction, design, choreography, etc.) from parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc. It is particularly important that the parents of all team members and the community understand this rule and agree to uphold it no matter how tempting it might be at certain points throughout the process to help a member of a team.

At the middle school, our *Destination Imagination* teams are rallying to prepare for the upcoming regional tournament in

March.

On Saturday March 24, 2007, the teams will travel to the regional *Destination Imagination* competition. Should the teams place, they would be invited to the New York State competition which is an exciting event and makes the teams eligible to participate in the *Destination Imagination World Competition* held later that spring. Check our website for updates on our student's performance.

In order for our teams to participate in this tournament, however, we need your help. We need volunteers who are willing to serve as judges at the regional competition in Yorktown. This would require a training session on a Saturday morning in February (place and time TBA).

If you can volunteer some time to help us this year, please contact Mrs. Murphy at bmurphy@blindbrook.org.

BREAKING THE BARRIERS WITH ASL

The student who waves while passing your son or daughter in the hallway or the child jogging next to yours on the playground could be deaf. How is school different for hearing-impaired students? Conversely, what kinds of things are the same for all students? For over fifteen years, our school district has been home to the BOCES Deaf and Hearing-impaired Program. Hearing-impaired refers to various types of hearing loss. A person is hearing impaired if they are either deaf or hard-of-hearing.

In the fall, a professional development workshop was offered to Blind Brook's teachers to learn and use American



Colin Byrne, Technology Teacher & Coordinator learns to sign the word for "5 minutes"

Sign Language (ASL). Fifteen teachers from all three of our schools signed up for the class. Because sign language interpreters work in many of our classes, deaf students can understand what their teachers are saying. Many of the regular classroom teachers who have deaf students in their classes also wanted to be able to communicate directly with those students as well. In the ASL workshop, the teachers focused on learning both basic communication and basic phrases used in school. No one in the class was allowed to use their voice to speak, including the teacher. The workshop was an amazing success--teachers reported how wonderful their instructor, Patricia Compton of Southern Westchester BOCES, was and communicated their desire for additional training.

Our deaf students appreciate the efforts of their hearing teachers to learn and use sign language. Learning to communicate in any new language is not easy and we thank our teachers who continue to practice their skills. The reward for everyone involved is the experience of a direct and personal communication between the deaf students and the teachers in their own classes.

Did you know? In the United States, an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 citizens use American Sign Language. This makes ASL the fourth most common language in the country.

Save These Dates!!

Board of Education Presentations

February 12

Gr. 3-8 Math 2006 Data Analysis Report

February 26

Superintendent's 2007-08 Proposed Budget

March 12

2007-2008 Administrative/Capital Budget

March 26

2007-2008 Budget Presentation
Elementary School Programs, K-12 Curriculum & Technology

April 9

2007-2008 Budget Presentation
Middle/High School & Guidance Programs

April 16

2007-2008 Budget: PPS & Athletics Programs

May 7

Student Report Cards/Parent Reporting

May 14

Writing Across the Curriculum K-12

All meetings in the BBMS/HS IMC - 8:00 P.M.

In the Pupil Services office we often joke that the school year begins and ends for us on the first day of school. That is because once the doors open in September our conversations turn to discussing and planning how we will best meet the needs of our students for the following school year. This course of planning culminates with the annual review process. Throughout the year our door is always open to parents but at annual review time we are required to meet with parents to discuss the educational needs of their children for the next school year. We welcome this opportunity to share with you some changes and procedures to the annual review process.

Annual Reviews will begin the first week of February and continue through the end of the school year. Parents will begin receiving notification of these meetings within the next month and should call the Pupil Services Office, extension 3020 (for Pre-K and Ridge Street) and ext. 3054 (Middle School/ High School) to make appointment. Please keep in mind that we are scheduling about 200 meetings during this time frame. The following individuals will be Chairing the Annual Reviews: High School - Carrie Merlo; Middle School - Louise Miller; Ridge Street - Debbie Augarten; Pre-School- Nicole Greenberg.

We look forward to these meetings to further forge the parent-school relationship that is so critical to the education of our students. Prior to the annual review meeting, parents will receive a telephone call advising them that the annual review packets are ready for pick up in the Pupil Services office at Ridge Street School.

At the meeting, it is the role of the Committee on Special Education (CSE), to determine the levels, abilities and needs of each student and recommend appropriate services. The Blind Brook - Rye UFSD provides a variety of programs for our students ranging from special education services in a mainstream classroom, to special education services provided in a self-contained setting. Some of the services we offer along our Continuum of Services include: consultant teacher - a special education teacher who pushes into the general education classroom to provide services; resource room - typically a one period pull-out with a Special Educator and 1-5 students; ELA block - daily small-group ELA instruction in a self-contained setting; self-contained class - designed to meet the needs of students in a highly structured setting.

It is the CSE's responsibility to determine not only the appropriate services but also

the least restrictive environment in which to provide those services. As the information and acronyms swirl around you at the CSE meeting, please stop us and ask for clarification. It is vital that parents be a partner in the educational planning of their child and is our hope that they remain our partner throughout the year.

In addition to providing these services, we meet the needs of students through our professional development opportunities and special programs. For example, recognizing the need for a structured approach to the teaching of social skills, we are piloting, at the Middle School, S.O.S. - Social Skills in our Schools. Using a peer mentor model, this program supports our student's social integration into this special Blind Brook Community. With the success of this program at the Middle School, we hope to expand S.O.S. to our students at the Ridge Street School.

At the beginning of this calendar New Year and as we plan for next year, please contact us with your thoughts and feedback. As for us, New Year's Day comes in September!!

Gene Wolotsky, Director of Pupil Services
Deborah Augarten, CSE/CPSE Chair

Students Make Sure Safety Comes First

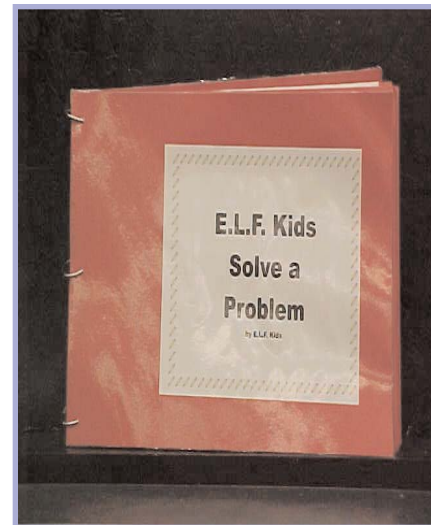
When one of Ms. Esposito's first grade students hit his head on a fire alarm box when walking through the hall, the class began to investigate. They discovered a dangerous condition--the level of the fire alarm boxes was high enough for a head to knock into as students walked through the halls. The class realized that this condition could also lead to the possibility of false alarms being made. Since the students were studying a unit in "Writing for a Purpose," they began a letter-writing campaign.

They wrote to our superintendent, their principal, the head custodian and anyone

else they thought would listen to their concerns about the fire alarm boxes.

The administration responded quickly to the students' letters. Mr. Rodriguez, RSS custodian & electrician was assigned to do a walk-through with the students to identify the most dangerous fire alarm boxes. After the walk-through, fire alarm box covers were purchased and installed and the students were given a demonstration on how they work.

Since their installation, three false alarms have been prevented, well worth the money invested in this project and a great lesson for the students.



Blind Brook Public Schools
SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

THE EXCHANGE

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