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Lamorinda Schools

Joaquin Moraga • Lafayette Elementary • Los Perales • Miramonte • Orinda Intermediate • Sleepy Hollow • Springhill • Stanley Middle • Wagner Ranch

Not Your Usual Science Fair

By Lee Borrowman

“There was a huge hydrogen explosion!” A young voice carried across the parking lot at Stanley Middle School last Thursday night. The “explosion” was actually the grand finale of a presentation by the Lawrence Hall of Science called “Flames, Flares and Explosions,” designed to teach the science and safety behind fire, that caught the undivided attention of the many young scientists and their parents who came out to the Stanley Science Expo 2007.

Word had spread throughout local schools that the Science Expo was an event not to be missed, and attendance was unusually high for a middle school offering. Science

teacher Mike Meneghetti, the school liaison for the event, said “This is the one night a year on which science takes center stage. It has far exceeded our expectations! The community involvement has been overwhelming. The kids really enjoyed the chance to display their projects for so many people to see.” In addition to the estimated ninety student projects on display, which ran the science fair gamut, the Expo featured tables and presentations by a variety of Bay Area organizations. Students had the opportunity to play wheel chair ball games, use their spit to test their DNA, learn how video games are made and much more.



Al McNeice teaches volunteer Ethan to maneuver a wheelchair

Sixth-grader Dana Katz, whose project was a Rube Goldberg Machine (defined by Webster’s as a “comically involved, complicated invention,

laboriously contrived to perform a simple operation”), said “Mr. Meneghetti is great at coming up with fun projects! My mom helped me put it together.” Katz also had some time to browse the exhibit with friends. The group deemed the LHS program “very cool,” and also enjoyed learning about how “normal plants are used to help heal sick people” at a display presented by the UC Botanical Gardens.

Olivia Blodgett and Isabelle Tankka were busily stirring “slime” created at the Lawrence Livermore National Lab’s interactive chemistry exhibit. The slime was made with polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) and Borax. The girls explained, “We have to keep stirring so it doesn’t all get stuck on the stick. It’s like stirring jelly, and it smells like glue.” Participants were gloved and goggled, “because you have to be safe when you’re working with chemicals.” The finished product was carefully scooped into plastic bags for the courageous parents who allowed it to make the car trip home.

The event was sponsored by the Lafayette Art and Science Foundation and organized by the Stanley PTA. Program coordinator Mary Ilyin said, “It’s really important for kids to see how science is used. We’re so lucky to be living in this area, where there are so many people who are involved in the sciences and willing to share their expertise with the schools.”

Sports Medicine Class Hears from the Experts

San Francisco 49ers athletic trainers Jeff Ferguson and Jeff “T-Nak” Tanaka were in Lafayette last week to speak to the Acalanes High School Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Sports Medicine class. Their appearance capped a week of guest presentations. The class also hosted UCB athletic trainer Ryan Cobb and MEDCO Sports Medicine Supply Regional Sales Director Mark Soutar.

NFL team. Neither of the trainers ever thought they’d work for a professional football team. “We are really no better than a trainer who works for a college team or in a clinical setting,” said Ferguson. “We just worked very hard in our studies and with our hands-on techniques. If you are interested in continuing in this type of work, we recommend you do the same. And make sure to master your people skills,



Wrist-wrapping demo, L to R: Clark, Ferguson and Tanaka with students Eryn Clancy, Aimee Bobet and Andrew Jamshidi

Photo by: Judith McCall, CCCOE

The visits were organized by Acalanes head athletic trainer and ROP sports medicine teacher Chris Clark, who said, “It has been great for our students to meet such a high-caliber of sports medicine professionals. The students can really see the end result of their classroom education and the hands-on training we provide here in class.”

Ferguson and Tanaka told about their journey from high school to being athletic trainers with a

which may be the most important asset you can bring to this job or any other job.

The ROP is the largest program within the Contra Costa County Office of Education’s Student Programs. It is a career training program designed for high school juniors, seniors and adults. The goal of ROP is to help students learn about career opportunities and develop job skills. For more information, visit www.cocoschools.org/stsvcs/rop.html.



Medicinal plants from UC Botanical Garden



Hands on your (sheep) hearts! (R-Dr. Carl Nibley)

Pictures: Lisa Duncan

The Lamorinda School pages are designed to be a space where events and activities taking place at our schools and in our classrooms can be shared with the community. We invite you to submit suggestions or guest articles to Schooldesk@lamorindaweekly.com and send photos to pictures@lamorindaweekly.com.

ORINDA ACADEMY summer school 2007



Session 1: June 18 - July 10
Session 2: July 12 - August 3
9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

- Earn High School Credit
- Algebra I & 2, Geometry
- English, U.S. History
- Basic Skills Review for Middle School
- College Prep Requirements
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OAC Student Visual Arts

The Orinda Arts Council announced on March 14 that 239 entries have been received for its 2007 Student Visual Arts Competition. This annual event showcases and acknowledges 2-D, 3-D and photography work by high school students who live in or attend school in Orinda, Lafayette or Moraga. Entries were received from students attending Acalanes, Athenian, Bentley, Campolino, Head Royce, Miramonte and Orinda Academy high schools.

Cash prizes and merit citations will be announced on Sunday, March 25, at an awards ceremony beginning at 3:30 p.m. at the Orinda Library Art Gallery. Judges include Bay Area artists, art educators and gallery owners Sheila McNulty, Andrew Denman, Susan Kendall, Jim Jordan, Gerry Wallace, Heidi Donner, Russell Abraham, John Chiara and Wenda Pyman.

A public display of the student entries will be on view at the Orinda Library Art Gallery, March 23rd through April 12th. Competition details are available at www.orindaartscouncil.org.

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for non re-election. Senior Kelli Park, an organizer of the event, said “We decided to do this after a series of not so drastic measures. Our voices were not being heard and our issues were not being addressed. We, the students of Mr. Fernandez, believe that he is an excellent, passionate, and dedicated teacher. Taking him away just contradicts what we have been taught: That our voices matter.”

Fernandez just began teaching at Miramonte this year. According to AUHSD Superintendent Jim Negri, state regulations require that all new teachers serve a probationary period of two years and are not considered permanent employees until that period is complete. The district may elect not to renew a probationary teacher for the following year, and is not required to give cause for the action.

Two probationary teachers in the district were given notices of non-re-election, but Negri says, “I understand the frustration of the students, but I can neither confirm nor deny their names, nor can I give the reasons behind the decisions.” He continues, “These decisions are more complex than people may be aware. Many factors are taken into consideration before such an action is recommended.”

Fernandez says

that on Feb. 15 he was told by administrators that he would not be coming back to teach the following year. Almost immediately after the decision was made, a campaign group on Facebook.com called “Save Mr. Fernandez” was created by Miramonte senior Allie Thomson. The group has had between 60-100 representatives at two school board meetings and has spoken on Fernandez’s behalf.

Fernandez was shocked by the decision. “I was completely blindsided. If I had seen it coming that would have been one thing, however, I had not been reprimanded since teaching at Miramonte. There is a lot of ambiguity and confusion in this whole situation,” said Fernandez.

During the walk-out, students were filmed by school campus security director Drue Kendall. Officers of the Orinda Police Department were also present. Outside news crews were not allowed access to the Miramonte campus.

The students will be disciplined under school policy, but say they will continue to protest the decision.

Naveed Hasan is a senior at Miramonte High School and a feature writer for Lamorinda Weekly.