

End of the Year Gifts – PTA Projects – Grandparents Gifts: The Little Author has it All

By Sophie Braccini

This year, every room parent can easily get a great end-of-the-year gift for their favorite teacher: A book in which original pieces of work from every student, such as drawings, writing or collage, are printed and bound to last. The company offering this service is The Little Author. They scan the artwork, you decide on the lay out: first the dedication, second each of the 24 pages, with text (more can be added), and finally the "about the authors" page with class picture.

The Little Author is an Orinda company that was created in 2005. It all started when Maxton and Sharon Beck's children began to ask about their art: "What will we do with it Mommy? Could it be in a book?" Maxton, a broker of Municipal Bonds and artist during his free time, designed the project with his wife to make their children's dream come true. It has been growing steadily since and has attracted

a lot of attention lately with an appearance on ABC and reviews in Diablo Magazine. The couple is constantly working on improving the web site (<http://thelittleauthor.com/>) so the process is easy. They want to make it extra simple for school fundraisers: All you have to do is inform the parents and they will get a special code to include their child's art in the group project. "This is perfect for auctions and end-of-the-year gifts" says Sharon, who had been working with the Orinda school that her children attend. 15% of the proceeds come back to PTAs. "It brings tears to parents' eyes when they see their children's art in a book" adds Maxton.

Of course, this technique can be of great service for families too. All of us have a large box in a garage closet where the art work that our kids have been producing for years is stored. Sometimes we keep it because it made them so proud, some-

times we keep it because these pieces are the expression of a real emotion, of a special moment or highlights their unique talent and we just can't do away with it. Will we let them disintegrate in their box, will we throw it away when the kids leave the nest? Now, you can create books (or note cards) from those masterpieces.

If your child writes stories and illustrate them, this will work beautifully; if you want to make a grand-parent gift with pieces from all of their grandchildren, that will work as well. You can do a book per year, a "best of"... your imagination and your children's creativity is the limit.

The cost of the hard cover, 24-page book is \$68, and a soft cover book is \$45. You can order 10 note cards with envelopes for \$15. This is not inexpensive, but we live in communities where 4th graders get cell-phones and middle-schoolers will not be happy if theirs is not the latest technology. At least, we can keep these books, share them later with the next generation and won't have to keep all those drawings stuck on the fridge until they drop.



Local Soldier in Baghdad

By Cathy Tyson

While the average Lamorindan is watching the war play out on television from the comfort of their home, one area young man is serving his country as an Army Ranger.

Kyle Soler, a graduate of Campolindo High School, class of '01 is in Iraq, bravely defending the country. After Campo, he attended and graduated from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. I "spoke" to him via e-mail while he was home on leave for the first time in 7 months. His parents Pat and Jeff Soler say they may get a call only once a month because of the intermittent phone service, e-mail is mostly unavailable because the land-lines go down frequently and there are usually long lines when it is available at his base. They are able to keep track of his unit stationed at Forward Operating Base Falcon, just outside of Baghdad with Dept. of Defense automated press releases that identify casualties. "I think any parent is concerned about their child, but when you have a son serving in the military in a time of war, those concerns are multiplied, I am definitely aware of the danger," says Pat Soler.

Kyle has been hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and has lost 19 of 31 close friends in a 6-month timespan. "Bad things happen to good people," Mrs. Soler reflects on lessons learned the hard way by her son. Despite all of the hardships he's endured, Kyle signed up for another 2-year term after his current stint of 5 years and 19 weeks is complete. In his own words, Kyle Soler:

Why did you enlist?

Simple roots are back to 9/11 and thinking that there was always more that someone

should do. But I was a freshman in college when 9/11 happened and I completed my degree and enlisted nearly the next day. It came down to here I was in control of my life and around me people were still dying in a far off country. I figured that it was time to stop thinking that other people should do something, and go out there and do it myself - and maybe along the way bring back some of our men safely.

What do you do on an average day?

Our days vary in length and work. Often we run one mission a day whether it be at night or during the afternoon. We wake up, grab our gear and head down to the trucks. Receive our briefing on the drive to our patrol base and leave the FOB (Forward Operating Base). Whereas a lot of other units spend most of their time patrolling in vehicles, we just go to our patrol base then start our actual missions on foot. We tend to walk anywhere from four to fifteen kilometers before we arrive at our objective. Some days we are meeting with locals and trying to slowly build their trust in us, and other days we are detaining suspected insurgents or searching for weapons caches. Either way as the temperature gets higher it makes for long hot days, with the ever-present shadow of danger. (Up to 120 degrees.)

Where are you stationed?

I'm stationed out of Ft. Richardson, Alaska. I am part of the 4th brigade, 25th Infantry Division, an airborne Brigade Combat Team that stood up in October of '05. When I return to Iraq, I will be at FOB Falcon.

Do you get homesick?

We all get homesick in our own ways. I am very close to my family and we send letters



Kyle Soler Campo Class of 2001

and I try to call at least once a month when I'm over there, if simply to hear a welcomed voice. It's hard to grasp though just how strong of a family the men you work with over there create for each other. They really are like brothers to you, so it helps a lot.

What do you do on leave?

On leave I've done everything and nothing. I've been able to just sit quietly or go for walks and 'decompress' everything over the last 7 months. I've also traveled throughout the East Bay and will be heading up to Oregon for a week. You just want to see family and friends but you don't want to feel obligations on you because that's all that you've been dealing with is stressful obligations for the past seven months.

Jeff and Pat said a final farewell to Kyle at the airport last weekend, as he headed back to Baghdad. The Transportation Security Administration (and airlines) have loosened their rules and now allow families to say goodbye at the gate, rather than curbside. Pat: "Just sitting next to him, waiting for the airline to call his group to board was fantastic, but sad as well. Just being able to touch him, words aren't necessary, meant a lot to me. It was at least a three-hankie goodbye, but he only saw a few tears. And yes, it was a long, lonely ride home."

Tech-Savvy Echo Boomers Change Campus Life

By Jennifer Wake

Know how to text-message or ever chat on Facebook? If so, consider yourself tech-savvy.

If you have done these things simultaneously, however, while listening to your iPod and uploading digital photos to MySpace, you are likely part of Generation Y, also known as "Echo Boomers," born in the 1980s and early 1990s. They are the quintessential "multitaskers" who are now filling college dorm rooms and changing the way colleges teach.

Saint Mary's is keeping pace with the demands of these students by offering podcast lectures, online chat-rooms, course-specific web-sites, and adding equipment such as robotic-mounted telescopes that give real-time video feed to astronomy labs.

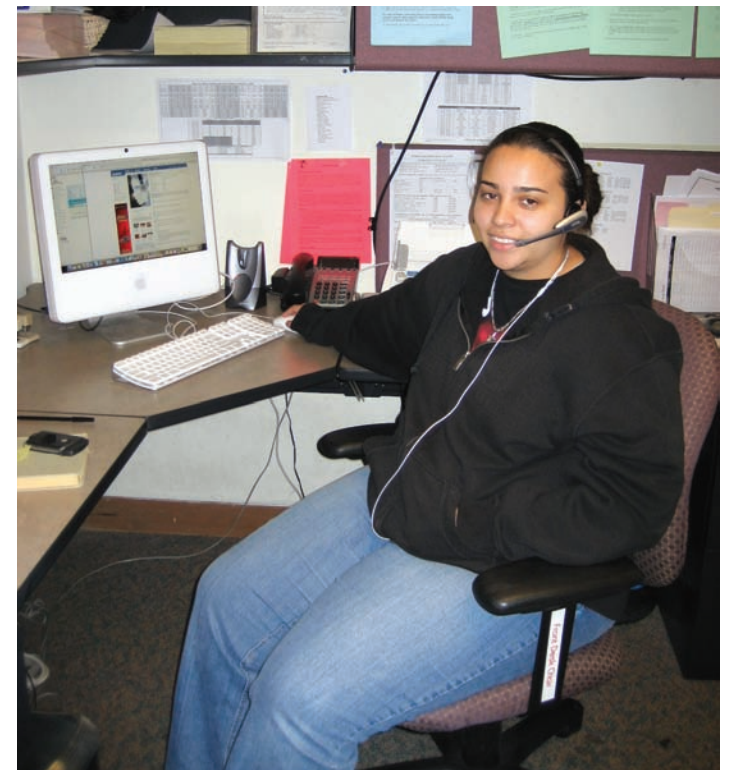
The college president, Brother Ronald Gallagher, has a blog and people can download his speeches. Students can even IM (instant message) a research librarian.

"Young people take to this technology like fish to water," said Saint Mary's Events Technology Manager Rob Limon. Since coming to Saint Mary's last October, Limon has helped students develop podcasts and blogs of their experiences during travel courses, outfitted students with digital cameras and Macs, and trained them how to use Final Cut Pro to produce videos that can be viewed online. He has also worked with students and faculty, using his media production equipment, to create innovative films and commercials to enhance course work.

"[Students] wanted to share with the community their efforts to rebuild the Bayou in January. Creating a video blog addressed their needs, so our SMC Technology department developed a media communication plan and trained the students in a digital media classroom, set up their blogger and YouTube accounts, and they were just off to the races," Limon said. "The whole concept of social networking through the Internet is really inspiring to me; you can really communicate to [students] in a different way that's relevant to them."

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, three out of four teenagers have gone online, and 93% of those ages 15 to 17 are computer users, spending the majority of time emailing, instant messaging and gaming. Researchers note that the lives of these Echo Boomers have been shaped by the Internet and the constant flood of new technologies available to them.

Limon works with fac-



SMC student Stephanie Olanos multi-tasks regularly with iPod, phone, and computer. Photo by Jennifer Wake

ulty to find new ways to incorporate technology into the teaching environment. An Oakland resident who worked in Oakland schools for 15 years before coming to Saint Mary's, Limon also occasionally conducts workshops at K-12 schools with high risk students, incorporating technology into the mix to re-energize students about learning.

"You can really reach out to those students who aren't achieving in the standard academic sense," he said. "You'll see 'at risk' students hammering on keyboards, doing text messaging. They want it, they use it, they are fully expressive with it. We just need to find a way to leverage it."

Last month, Limon was approached by the college to help promote De La Salle Week, in honor of the college founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Once again, Limon found his thoughts jumping "out of the box."

"How do you teach youth? Communicate through Hip-Hop," he said. Utilizing the cutting-edge technology of YouTube, Limon helped three students coordinate and produce a Lasallian-themed rap song, "Mind Cultivation," and put it online (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=kEXAcpzac74>).

It was a huge success. "[Students] have linked up the rap song to their MySpace pages," he said.

Since the Saint Mary's residence halls on campus

are equipped with high-speed data connections to the Internet, a lot of students use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, send automated party announcements, and expand their network of friends, reaching hundreds. They can also access web-based technologies from asynchronous threaded discussion to web-based simulations and real-time web-based conferencing, all from their rooms.

The Hybrid MBA Program uses these technologies to reduce the amount of physical class time while maintaining a strong sense of continuous engagement. The MBA program gives students video iPods and uses real simple syndication (RSS); lectures can be uploaded directly from iTunes University.

"Anytime you plug in or turn on your computer or iTunes, it automatically downloads in the latest upload of the lecture," said Limon. "One of the professors said given the time constraints of the lecture, she'll do enhanced units on certain subjects [online], which allows her to present a new take or a couple of different takes so it enhances her normal lecture."

For now, the struggle is finding ways to access new technologies while working within the confines of a sometimes slower-moving institution. "It's a bit of Wild West out there right now," said Limon.

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