

School is out - yeah!

Have fun, kids! Lamorinda Weekly team

Retiring Acalanes Teachers Reflect

By Anna Eames, Intern

Janet and Ramsey Thomas have been teachers in the Acalanes High School Union District for twenty-three years each. Combined, they have contributed fifty-six years towards education, and while they are not retiring from teaching, both are now retiring from this district.

They began working at Campolindo in 1984, Ramsey teaching chemistry at first, and Janet teaching math. Nineteen years ago, Ramsey moved to Acalanes, and Janet, after teaching at UC Berkeley for a time, was asked to start an AP Chemistry course at Acalanes.

Janet eventually undertook biology, as well, and then decided to introduce high school students to the science of a world outside of biology and chemistry: our world. She instituted the now district-wide science course, Environmental Science, which she taught for the past five years.

"It's a class where we look at man's impact on the environment and analyze some of the problems that are present and look at what some of the strategies are to solve those problems," said Janet. "I see those issues as really important, especially to young people who are inheriting a lot of global problems."

The couple seemed to have a thing for adding to the evolution of academics, because Ramsey, who eventually left chemistry behind to become a history teacher, was also able to play a leading role in reintroducing and pioneering curriculum.

"We were able to bring back AP European History. That was not in the district ten years ago. We [also] started AP Gov-



Janet and Ramsey Thomas, both teachers

ernment. It was a big addition, because now everyone in the district has those, but we started them at Acalanes," said Ramsey, who taught these two classes in addition to AP U.S. History.

Ramsey also coached Cross Country and Track & Field during almost every year of his teaching career, as well as leading the Acalanes Model UN team to quite a few championships during his ten years as an advisor of the team.

Both of these teachers left their mark on literally thousands of students, many of whom have entered the adult world by now. Furthermore, they have claimed a role in the life of every future Environmental Science student in Lamorinda and many future history students.

"I have found teaching very rewarding," said Ramsey. "Certainly, at some level, it has been a passionate interest in learning, which I suppose is one of the main reasons I was inter-

ested in teaching; because learning is one of the most important things that I enjoy doing, so I think that some of that has gotten transferred in the classroom.

Janet shared this notion. "I always loved school myself...I've always enjoyed the process of learning. I love adolescents," she said. "I saw it as a career where I could serve, challenge, be creative and do something that I felt had a real effect on those around me...I love that you can always do something better and more creative to enhance your teaching practice. I've loved many of the colleagues I've worked with, as well."

While they are leaving us for now, this is not retirement. Janet is going to take at least a year off to focus on the many organizations and projects that she is a part of, leaving open the possibility of returning to teaching, and Ramsey has decided to teach chemistry and AP U.S. History at Pittsburg High School next year.

The Thomas' agreed that their students were a wonderful focal point for their careers. "What I've gotten to take [from teaching] is a positive feeling about kids. Twenty years ago, I wouldn't have said that," said Ramsey. "But the past twenty years, it's been very fulfilling living in the Lamorinda community."

"I wouldn't say that there are [favorite] moments, but just feelings at the end of the day that I have enjoyed my work - days where being with the students is just wonderful...It's really felt like an extension of who I am in my own community," said Janet.

Welcome to the Teen Scene column! This space is open to middle and high school students as a forum to express opinions and ideas or just something that's on your mind. You may write on any topic that interests you, but please use appropriate language.

Send columns to: Schooldesk@lamorindaweekly.com. We'll need your name, school/grade, and your home phone number. If your column is selected for publication, we will ask for parent permission and a picture of you!

Teen Scene column

Teen Scene: An Editorial on Gun Control

By Taro Takigawa, JM graduate

On Monday April 16, 2007, University of Virginia Tech student, Korean Cho Seung-Hui, killed 33 people, including himself, in the worst school massacre in the history of the United States. Because of Virginia's overly lax gun control laws, Cho was able to purchase two semiautomatic guns near the Virginia Tech campus. Unfortunately, it takes a tragedy like this to demonstrate our need for stricter gun control laws in all 50 states.

Unrestricted gun laws in Virginia allow citizens to purchase unlicensed handguns with no collapsible stock or an unthreaded barrel once a month. This law should be abolished and a stricter, revised gun control policy should be implemented.

In 2005, 14,860 homicides occurred in America. Out of those 14,860, 10,104 were killed by firearms. Gun-related homicides are tragic and to prevent them, many states should attempt to pass California gun-control laws like Kasler vs. Lockyer and Harrott vs. County of Kings to make purchasing firearms more difficult. Policies and laws such as these would effectively limit gun violence around the country.

To reduce illegal gun selling, former President Bill Clinton signed the Brady Bill into law in 1997. It requires that any person or persons buying a firearm receive a background check and prevents criminals and minors from legally purchasing firearms. However, in spite of constant amendments and changes to the Bill which have limited its effectiveness, the Brady Bill is a step toward reducing gun violence.

To stop gun violence in the United States, we should have an effective program that commits additional police to crime-populated areas. Operation Ceasefire is a mission to stop teenage crime and gun violence in Boston. Today, Operation Ceasefire is incredibly effective, preventing much crime in the Boston area. According to a Harvard University Kennedy School of Government study on Operation Ceasefire, "...For the second full year of operation, through May 31, 1998, there was a 71% decrease in homicides by persons ages 24 and under and a 70-percent reduction in gun assaults (for all ages)." Therefore, programs similar to Operation Ceasefire should be implemented where crime is a huge issue, like Los Angeles, California.

To prevent future tragedies, people should fight for harsher gun control laws that ban the selling of firearms to underage children and irresponsible adults. By taking actions and enforcing laws in the United States, we can stop the majority of senseless gun homicides like the massacre at Virginia Tech.



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Del Rey Takes a New Approach to Fundraising

By Lee Borrowman

What's a Parents Club to do when nobody has time to put on an auction? At Orinda's Del Rey Elementary this year, the answer was to find another way to raise money. The first Del Rey Annual Fund campaign raised \$229,950 by the end of the school year, nearly \$100K more than the school's annual auctions had averaged over the past four years.

"Our plan was to form a small committee and approach each family in the school to ask for their support," said Bob Dureault, the campaign's co-chair. "It was simple and direct, and best of all it gave everyone in the school a chance to participate." Committee members scheduled twenty minute visits to each family's home to explain to parents why the school needed their support.

According to campaign co-chair Alec Binnie, the Parent Club contributes \$800 per student to the school. "25% of the school's budget comes from voluntary parent contributions," explained Binnie.

Parents Club co-President Carolyn Parodi said, "Not only did we surpass our fundraising goals, we were also able to better educate parents on how critical these funds are to directly delivering educational programs to their kids."

75% of Del Rey families contributed to the campaign. The ten-member campaign committee found that an Annual Fund has many advantages that an auction does not. Parents were able to leverage over \$20,000 in corporate matching gifts, including generous contributions of software and hardware. A substantial contribution from a family foundation sent the numbers soaring. Because all of the donations went directly to the school, rather than in exchange for something with monetary value, the parents' contributions are 100% tax deductible. The Annual Fund campaign had virtually no overhead, so all donations can be used to fund school programs.

Due to the campaign's unprecedented success, the Parents Club can eliminate

several other fund-raisers next year; just imagine...no gift wrap to sell! It has also been much easier to fill vacancies on next year's Board because no one suffered from auction fatigue: "Rather than folks being burnt out or currently involved with planning the auction, we had people calling us and stepping forward to volunteer," said Parodi.

The Parents Club has established a long-range planning committee to determine how best to spend the unexpected windfall. The committee is talking to parents, teachers and administrators. High on the teachers' wish list is funding for classroom assistants and other programs which provide opportunities for more individual attention to students.

It appears likely that this success can be repeated. "The participation rate among our kindergarten through second grade families reached nearly 90% and generated more than 60% of our donations," said Binnie. "We are going to do just fine next year."

ORINDA ACADEMY summer school 2007



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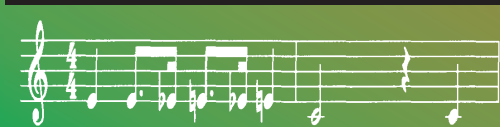
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