

School is out - yeah!

Have fun, kids! Lamorinda Weekly team

Popular JM Principal Steps Down

By Lee Borrowman

The Joaquin Moraga Middle School community was shaken and saddened to hear late last month that Principal Catherine Mikes will be leaving the Moraga School District due to health reasons. Mikes was diagnosed with cancer in mid-June, and has decided to focus on her family and health over the next several months as she undergoes various treatments. The District is beginning its search for Mikes' replacement, but those who worked with her believe she will be a tough act to follow.

Mikes has been highly regarded as a dedicated and "hands-on" principal. JM Vice Principal Brad Cam said of her, "She worked tirelessly throughout the year to implement the district's strategic plan and to make JM a more student-centered environment."

She was proud of the school and its students, and liked to attend and participate in classes. On any given day, visitors to JM might have encountered Mikes speaking with delight about the first edition of the newspaper created by Journalism students, or covered in red clay after joining the Ceramics class.

The walls of Mikes' office were plastered with "to-do" lists; goals were checked off as they were attained. Although she had only just completed the first year of her appointment, Mikes already had many accomplishments under her belt. The school now has its first full-time counselor, Heidi Felt, who has worked closely with Mikes to institute a zero-tolerance policy regarding bullying. She coordinated improvements to the after school support program for at-risk students and oversaw the creation and implementation of a Writing Development Plan. She also worked on assessment strategies for math placement of incoming 6th graders, and as a result a cohort of incoming 6th graders in the 06-07 school year was identified and this group, when they become 8th graders, will comprise the first ever

full Geometry class at JM. Mikes spearheaded the effort that resulted in JM being named a California Distinguished School this spring.

Mikes worked closely with teachers and with the support of the JM PTA also revamped the elective program at the school, increasing the availability of elective classes and offering some new and exciting choices such as a 6th grade Exploratory Wheel, in which students cycle through a variety of different courses during the year, and a video production/live broadcasting elective for 7th and 8th graders.

PTA President Erin Bydalek said, "I really enjoyed working with Catherine. She gave us a lot of access, and we worked in partnership with her to raise needed money for the site. She was able to initiate a lot of positive changes at JM, and was very supportive of PTA programs as well."

In a written statement to parents, Moraga School District Superintendent Richard Shafer said, "We are grateful for Ms. Mikes' many contributions during this past year. We wish her the very best in her recovery and in all her future endeavors. Our immediate priority will be to hire her replacement as soon as the best-qualified candidate can be selected - this process hasn't been worked out, but it is on a critical path. Parents, teachers, and other stakeholders will be involved."

Cam assures parents, "The administration and staff are determined to work diligently to ensure a smooth opening of school and implement the positive changes that Catherine initiated." Shafer will be working with Cam and other administrators over the summer. "I expect minimal disruption when students and staff begin to return in August," said Shafer.



Brad Cam and Catherine Mikes

Photo by Dana Ludwig

Our First Sleep-Away Camp

By Sophie Braccini

Would you send your eight year old child to an overnight co-ed camp? When I looked for a fun overnight camp for my girls in the vicinity I found the co-ed, all sports over-night camp at Saint Mary's College. Close enough to feel safe, yet still an overnight camp to give them the thrill of being on their own and to us, the parents, a little time to ourselves.

The girls shared a room complete with a microwave, a fridge and shared bathroom.

It would be an understatement to say they were a little bit excited as they put their clothes away, set up their sleeping bags and prepared to send us on our way. We lingered as long as we could to be sure everything was in order but we were running out of time. One last "put all your sports equipment in this drawer, are you sure you have everything you need and how does the bathroom shower work?" "Yes, Mom, yes, Dad, now it's time for you to go." How could they be so ready to see us go?

The girls didn't take their cell phones with them. We regretted it almost immediately when we realized they might not call us for a



Happy Campers!

week! Luckily, they found a way, and called us 3 times during their stay.

At the end of the session, parents were invited to share a barbecue and attend their last game. The final ceremony was the opportunity for us to meet Randy Farris, the Camp Manager, who has run the camp for 30 years. We got to meet our girls' favorite counselors, Randy and Allie, two Saint Mary's students who coached and supervised them through their days at camp.

The all-sports camp is a very intensive camp. From 7:30 AM to 8 PM the day is packed with games and activities. The girls practiced tennis, swimming, handball, soccer, dodge ball and hockey. Campers range from 8 to 14 years

old and they're separated by age for activities. Counselor Allie says, "It can get a little rowdy but those are good kids, we never have serious problems." Free time comes after 8PM and that's when new friendships are formed. The campers come from all over the East Bay and beyond; one of my daughters made friends with a girl from Seattle.

After the final goodbyes were said and the bags were safely stored in the car, the stories started gushing. The final word went to the girls: to the question would you do it again, we got an enthusiastic "Yes!" I went online and registered them for another overnight camp, this time a soccer and a volleyball camp. They'll be ready for college by the time summer is over.

Got Summer?

Since school's out, we have room for summer on these pages! Now that the heat is on, we'd love to receive photos of your favorite summer activity! Tell us about your cool camp, swimming/tennis/basketball fun, or whatever else you're doing to make this the best summer ever! Email schooldesk@lamorindaweekly.com!

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Paul Caccamo's Postcard

On Wednesday, June 27, Moraga music teacher Paul Caccamo checked in from the Pacific Crest Trail at mile 906, having completed 1/3 of his journey:

There are not enough superlatives to describe the scenery we have experienced as we crossed through Kings Canyon National Park, we are so fortunate to have this national treasure right here in our backyard. Most of the places we have traveled through are accessible by a two- or three-day hike from the end of a road; you can see for yourselves and will not have to rely on my inadequate descriptions! If you don't want to walk you can go by horseback.

All this great scenery does not come without cost. This section requires the hapless hiker to summit a pass of at least 12,000 feet once a day. This entails climbing 4,000 feet and then dropping 4,000 feet, then waking up to do it again the next day. Because it is a low snow year, the passes were easier than most years, but still dangerous at times.

In the interest of full disclosure I must tell you that we have underestimated the physical demands of this journey as well as their effects on the body. The day before we reached Mammoth was the first I seriously contemplated leaving the trail, as my feet were killing me and my energy was non-existent no matter what I ate. I am taking an extra day off, to



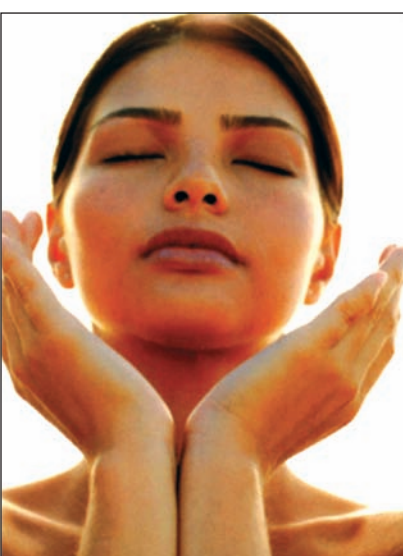
Paul Caccamo at Kings Canyon National Park

recharge my body and mind for the next leg. The trail becomes much easier from here on out, so we'll be fine. If I ever felt like I wasn't enjoying myself anymore I would definitely leave the trail but the rewards still far outweigh the minor discomfort I'm experiencing.

Because of the extra day, I will no longer be hiking with

some wonderful friends I have made out here....Fester, Grimace, Rocham, and Germinator. Still, I expect to meet others and my good buddy Figaro, with whom I left the Mexican border, is still with me.

Best wishes to you all, more to come in a couple hundred miles... Paul C.



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