

Lamorinda Schools

Orinda Junior Women's Club Announces "Green" Youth Ink 2009

Submitted by Lisa Rodriguez



7th- and 8th-grade OIS students in the Writing Symposium course Ms. Risso teaches at OIS Photo Mary Risso

The Orinda Junior Women's Club (OJWC) recently announced details for Youth Ink 2009. The annual creative writing contest is open to all sixth, seventh and eighth grade students who live or attend school in Orinda. The middle school writing contest supports literary arts within the community and awards cash prizes of \$250, \$125 and \$75 to the top three winners as well as 10 honorable mention gift certificates.

Youth Ink Co-Chair Lisa Rodriguez said the writing contest began over a decade ago and took a hiatus before being resurrected by Rodriguez and co-chair Barbara Sullivan in 2008. "My background is in writing and journalism and PR," says Rodriguez. Rodriguez explains that Sullivan also has a writing background so it was natural for them to get involved and they "immediately received wonderful

feedback from the community." Rodriguez says "Middle school includes so many changes and so many pressures," noting that while there are numerous sports-related outlets for those pressures, there aren't as many outlets in the arts and certainly not in writing.

The Youth Ink 2009 theme is GREEN. The theme was chosen based on feedback from the middle school student community. Sponsors believe it encourages highly personal and descriptive writing and lends well to open style choice. While GREEN entries could focus on the environment, students could also choose to write about a GREEN object, feeling GREEN, or whatever they choose. "We are glad to support a contest that recognizes writers - who are at times the unsung heroes of the arts," says Maureen Brown, president of OJWC. "We were amazed by the talented young

writers who entered last year's contest, and we can't wait to read this year's submissions." A panel of four local professional writers, including reporters and best-selling novelists, will evaluate Youth Ink 2009 submissions and choose winners. The judges' names will be shared when the winners are announced at an awards ceremony at the Orinda Public Library on Thursday, April 30.

Youth Ink 2009 submissions will be accepted on an ongoing basis but must be hand-delivered to a designated school representative or postmarked by March 4, 2009 in order to be considered for an award. Youth Ink 2009 submission forms are available through the administrative offices and English departments at Orinda Intermediate School, the Orinda Public Library, St. Perpetua School, Orinda Academy, Bentley School, Saklan Valley School and Julia Morgan School for Girls. The submissions can be mailed to: Youth Ink 2009, c/o Orinda Junior Women's Club, P.O. Box 40, Orinda, CA 94563.

Youth Ink 2009 sponsors include the Orinda Junior Women's Club, the City of Orinda, Friends of the Orinda Library, Ann Sullivan of Coldwell Banker, Denning & Company, Dragonfly Studio/Allyson Furlong Photography and several other local organizations and businesses.

Jean Follmer contributed to this article.

LAMORINDA'S

Preschools Weigh in on Economy

By T. R. Audley

Prior to 2008, Lamorinda parents were known to register their young children on the first day of the preschool enrollment period. They willingly completed numerous applications and paid non-refundable fees to secure a spot at one of their top choice schools. Many of the preschools in Lamorinda agree that times have changed. While the importance of early childhood education is understood and valued in our communities, local preschools are feeling the effects of competition for family dollars as a result of current economic conditions.

"We have noticed quite a change. We've had decreased enrollment in our twos program by half. When I first came to this community five years ago people were placing their kids in preschool at age 2 instead of 3. Now that trend seems to be reversing," reports Connie Kellaher of The Nurture in Moraga. Due to a lack of enrollment, Kellaher had to close one of her twos classes last fall. Other preschools also report changes to their part-time programs.

Meg Taggart-Wright of The Child Day School in Lafayette sees the business side clearly. "The economy is definitely having an effect on part-day schedules. Operating margins are small and reductions to class size are felt quickly," says Taggart-Wright. Like many schools, The Child Day School belongs to professional associations which provide schools with industry information. "I've heard of possible hikes in licensing fees as well as cutbacks to state funded early education programs," reports Taggart-Wright. Such costs could be more than many schools can bear.

"It feels like I'm in quick sand," says Ruth Kaiser, owner of Tot Drop in Lafayette. Tot Drop is an appointment based center where parents pay hourly instead of monthly. "With our program, parents have free time when they need it," reports Kaiser, who grew her business to seven different locations over 15 years due to high demand for her services. "I know it will be good again, but for us to survive and serve the community, we simply need more business," says Kaiser. Kaiser closed her Walnut Creek Tot Drop center for an entire day last

week due to low enrollment.

Filling open spaces during the school year is not new for preschools. But as Marilyn Ragan of Diablo Valley Montessori School reports, "Waitlists which would traditionally have worked to fill open spots are just not as long." Nevertheless, with increased available housing in the area, new families are moving to Lamorinda and some schools are benefiting. Carol Carter at St. John's Preschool in Orinda reports a recent increase in interest. "I am shocked by how many calls I've gotten in January," says Carter. Four new children started at St. John's last month.

Other schools also give positive reports while recognizing the change around them. Dot Feist of Joyful Beginnings Preschool in Lafayette says that her school raised tuition this year and really hasn't noticed any change. "We've been really blessed," Feist admits.

Thus it may not exclusively be the cost that is prohibitive. If it were, one might see a rise in applications to cooperative preschools where program fees are low in exchange for parent participation. Time is money, however, and many families seem to have less of either to spare. Enrollment is down at The Orinda Preschool and they are considering changing classes to make up for budget shortfalls. In past years at Lafayette Nursery School, parents lined up outside to register for the small, hands-on cooperative program. This year, only two applications came on the first day of enrollment.

Statistics and studies show that early childhood education is advantageous for future success in school. However, it seems that many Lamorinda families have yielded to economic pressures when considering education for preschool aged children. Connie Kellaher says socialization is the main goal that parents have for younger preschool aged children. "I get a sense that parents are feeling they can accomplish socialization through playdates," says Kellaher. As with many of our local businesses and private schools, the economic effects of 2009 will remain to be seen.

Jean Follmer contributed to this article.

OIS Diverse Abilities Awareness Week

By Jean Follmer



Photo submitted



Photo submitted

Orinda Intermediate School recently held its annual Diverse Abilities Awareness Week (DAAW). "The purpose of the week is to increase awareness and understanding of different disabilities, and most importantly to see beyond the disabilities and recognize the strengths and abilities of all people. Though it has evolved over the years, the week remains rich in information for the kids and parents," said Diverse Abilities Awareness Week Co-chair Susan Forman in a written statement.

OIS held activities throughout the week including hands-on stations where 6th graders had the opportunity to "experience a little of what it would be like to have a learning disability." DAAW Co-chair Anna Tague said the stations offered opportunities for auditory, visual and sensory motor experiential learning. The students rotated through the stations in groups of 30. As a visual exercise, the students were asked to read aloud from a page that contained words as seen by a dyslexic person. The experience enabled them to get a sense of the frustration that dyslexic persons can experience when trying to read.

To gain a glimpse of the difficulties people with auditory challenges face, the students participated in an exercise in which the students all wore headphones and listened to

instructions from a teacher. Some of the students could hear the teacher so could raise their hands when prompted and others just heard white noise and experienced feeling "left out" because they weren't able to hear the directions.

Finally, the students were asked to try to speak with Skittles in their mouths to gain some sense of what it's like to have a sensory motor disability that impacts speech. Through these experiences, the students learned that not all disabilities are "visible." While you can physically see that someone is in a wheelchair you can't "see" many other disabilities because they're invisible to the eye. That doesn't mean, however, that the disabled person does not have real challenges.

OIS held an evening Open House for the first time this year and parents had the opportunity to visit the sensory stations that the students had rotated through. Many location organizations, including the Center for Early Intervention on Deafness (CEID), PAWS for a Cause dog assistance, Sumakids OT and Lighthouse for the Blind hosted tables to share information about deafness, visual impairment, occupational therapy and dog assistance. There was also a wheelchair basketball game that evening: the Bay Area Outreach and Recreational Program (BORP) versus the OIS faculty (also

in wheelchairs). While BORP won 71-70, it was only because OIS was given 50 points to start and additional points later in the game. The OIS faculty only scored 5 legitimate points to the 71 points scored by BORP. Tague said the game enabled the audience to see that people with disabilities can still be competitive athletes.

The week ended with the sixth graders attending a question and answer style assembly with three disabled panel speakers: Richie Bennett, Lateef McLeod and Jessie Lorenz. Both Bennett and McLeod suffer from cerebral palsy while Lorenz is blind. Bennett is a former OIS student. A UC-Berkeley grad, Bennett is also a former world ranked wheelchair athlete. Bennett has coached wheelchair basketball with BORP since 1998 and is in his first year of graduate work at St. Mary's College in Moraga. McLeod is a writer who holds an undergraduate degree from UC-Berkeley and a graduate degree from Mills College.

Lorenz is a professional athlete who participated in both the 2004 and 2008 Paralympics on the US Women's Goal ball team. She has earned a World Championship title and numerous medals in the sport. In 2008, she carried the Olympic Torch as it made its way through San Francisco and won her second consecutive Paralympic Games medal with a gold in Beijing. Lorenz is Director of Public Policy for the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco. She also helped bring accessible crossing signals to San Francisco intersections.

Lorenz told the students it's never been physical boundaries that have made her life difficult, but attitudes and misconceptions. Lateef is only able to speak through a computer. He told the crowd that people frequently judge his intelligence because he is unable to speak without the computer.

Tague said the fact that Bennett experienced life in a wheelchair in the halls of OIS really resonated with the students. After the assembly was over, 30-40 kids rushed the stage to speak to the panelists. Although they had to get to their next class, Tague said the kids "really wanted to stay and have more time with them."

OIS has been holding Diverse Abilities Awareness Week for over a decade as part of its Character Education program.



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5 Ways to Improve

By Theresa Tsigis, D.C. M.S.
As a child my family's menu

In the last issue, we covered staying healthy in later years; let's begin at the beginning now. Here are 5 common challenges facing parents regarding the nutrition of toddlers, and strategies for handling them:

- 1) Food Fussiness
- 2) Food Allergies
- 3) Colic & other Digestive problems
- 4) Eczema, Asthma, or Ear Infections
- 5) Refined carbohydrate cravings

1). Food Fussiness - Almost every preschooler has food preferences, to the exclusion of other foods. I remember my 3 year old son shouting in a health food store, "I don't like healthy foods, I like junky foods!" While a funny memory, a toddler's food stubbornness may lack entertainment value in the moment. Surprisingly, the best approach besides patience is that old Boy Scout adage "Be Prepared." Planning a healthy variety of foods for the entire family - and presenting them creatively - will intrigue many a tot with the process. You may find your little one monopolizing the guacamole, artichokes, and asparagus. And if not, be assured that as they grow, toddlers expand their repertoire. One psychology approach that still works with my youngest is, "Taste this today, even if you don't think you like it- your taste buds are growing just like you are growing into a big boy."

2). Food Allergies - This issue increasingly pertains to a young child's health. For some, the prevention reaches back to pregnancy. The mother's own internal health and allergy patterns may influence the future health of her offspring. Food reactions are mediated by different antibodies, and may be delayed or acute in nature. Life-threatening al-

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