

Two Small Women Making a Big Difference

By Sophie Braccini



Susan Allison (left) and Mary Ann McLeod on the playground at Mulberry Tree Photo Sophie Braccini

Mary Ann McLeod will retire this year. After more than 30 years at the head of Moraga's Mulberry Tree Preschool, she is passing the baton to Susan Allison who has been with her as a Director for 10 years.

The two women have much in common, though a generation apart in age. They are petite, vivacious and warm, they share the same passion for education, and both graduated with the same Master's in Early Childhood Education from Saint Mary's College.

The preschool, on Saint Mary's Road, is a remarkable construction. A circular wooden structure, it was first owned by Tory and Robert Felton; Tory Felton was one of McLeod's teachers at Saint Mary's. "The round

structure is conducive to the type of learning that is occurring here," says McLeod, "the children move from one station to the next as their day unfolds."

"I started as an elementary school teacher," explains McLeod, "and I noticed that the first or second grade children had already acquired habits that were very hard to change. I believe that very early education is where you can build a foundation for life."

"The lesson plans are all based on a story line," explains Allison, "each of the four learning centers explores a different aspect of it through the art, cognitive learning, science, and movement. At each center, the teachers observe and challenge the children at their own level. Our mission is to de-

velop the cognitive, social, emotional and physical sides of every child."

"Here the children learn to learn," adds McLeod, "When they leave, they have learned to listen, to take turns, to take charge of themselves for some tasks, their social skills have blossomed, they can write some words."

Every few years, a new program is started at the school to take advantage of new research. "Three years ago we started implementing 'conscious discipline,'" says Allison, "it is a positive discipline approach that reinforces the positive behaviors with words. We as teachers do it, and now we are seeing the children doing it themselves." For example, if a teacher sees a child climbing on a table, instead of saying "Don't climb on furniture," she will say, "The play structure is for climbing," and she will show it to the child. "It works incredibly well," says McLeod, "we've given some informational material to the parents, and had a speaker about the method, so consistency is maintained between the home and the school."

Allison is already in charge of many things at the preschool; McLeod feels confident leaving the business that is so dear to her heart in Allison's hands. Allison feels comfortable as well, knowing that McLeod, who lives in Moraga and has grandchildren close by, will never be too far away.

Orinda Academy Adds Sixth Grade

Submitted by Miriam Schaffer

Orinda Academy, a private, non-profit day school in Orinda, California for boys and girls, announces it is adding a sixth grade class beginning with the Fall 2011 semester.

"We have had repeated requests from the community for a personalized, quality middle

school program that includes a sixth grade," says Ron Graydon, founder and head of the school. "This will give families another option when choosing a middle school for their child, and will allow students to spend their entire middle school years with us and then continue on to a success-

ful high school experience."

An open house will be held on Wednesday, April 20 at 7:00 p.m. at Orinda Academy for prospective students and their families interested in applying to grades 6 through 12. For more information go to: <http://www.orindaacademy.org/>.

5th Annual AUHSD Film Festival Coming Soon

By Rebecca Eckland



Julia Anderson, Sydney Liu and Kyle Merryman, all sophomores at Campolindo High School, as they work on a film project in their Video 2 class. Photo R.A.Eckland

On April 15th from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., students from Campolindo, Miramonte, Acalanes and JM Intermediate schools will be featured on "the red carpet" of the Fifth Annual Lamorinda Acalanes Union Film Festival at the Campolindo Performing Arts Center. Roughly twenty short films will be screened; what the films will be about is only limited by the imaginations and creative impulses of the students who produce them.

Justin Seligman, Video instructor at Campolindo High School (and Festival Coordinator), says that on any given day his students are producing a total of thirty short films. Seligman pauses to do the math: "That's five

classes, six to ten projects per class, so yes, thirty films a day."

He gives his students many different film types to work on, not simply the narrative-driven pieces one might expect. So far, his students have tackled various genres and styles: the silent film, musicals, sitcoms, the safety films you have to watch at certain jobs, infomercial and film noir, to name a few. "Some programs focus on personal narratives (personal editorials using film as medium) - this one focuses less on that. This type of program gives students a broad spectrum of approaches and allows them to dabble in areas that interest them. In the industry today, until you make it 'big' in Hollywood, you have to

have a large skill set in independent film making. You have to know how to shoot film, how to act, how to manipulate what you've shot." You have to be, to use a term Seligman taught this reporter, a "preditor" - that is, a producer/editor/actor.

Sophomore Julia Anderson wants to be a director one day, but for now is enjoying nearly all aspects of Seligman's curriculum, especially film editing. She took part in the film festival last year, winning an award for an infomercial on her invented product, "Port-A-Pants." Anderson explains: "We had to make up a product that didn't exist, so I thought, how great would it be to put stuff in your pocket to transport it somewhere else?" Right now she, as everyone in the class, is filming a sitcom.

Kyle Merryman, also a sophomore, is directing a sitcom that critiques the conventions in shows like "I Love Lucy." His project, "Gettin' Jiggy with It," has characters (played by students from the drama department) which include a cheating husband and a crazy, old-fashioned grandpa. "I love directing," says Merryman, "and I always watch the Oscars."

Eighty to one-hundred students will be involved in this year's film festival. The selection of which films/students to include will be made by Seligman and a few of his advanced students. Each film will be a "short" and last between one and five minutes. Also featured will be music by Jazztastic Voyage as well as several student DJs. Entrance is \$5.00.

"The program has grown so much in five years," said Seligman who cites generous community support as one major cause. Sponsors such as the Moraga Education Foundation, Campolindo Parents Club, and Contra Costa County Regional Occupational Program, among others, have provided the necessary financial assistance to keep the films rolling.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Acalanes Union
High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Next: Wednesday, April 13, 7:30pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, April 11, 4pm

Lafayette School District
LAUSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, April 13, 7pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate
School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, April 12, at 7:30pm

Martin Named Lafayette's Teacher of the Year

By Cathy Tyson



Teacher of the Year (on left) Carroll Martin with indispensable aide/student teacher Gail Nugent Photo Cathy Tyson

Carroll Martin gives a new level of meaning to the word multi-tasking. With not one but two busy classrooms to accommodate her 26 students in the Fourth-Fifth grade Alternative Instruction Magnet (AIM) split class at Burton Valley Elementary School, there is clearly never a dull moment for this veteran teacher of 39 years. She seems to take the constant whirlwind of activity in stride, seamlessly shepherding all of her students through social studies, spelling, math stations, reading, writing, language arts and science lab. Keep in mind that at times the group is broken up by grade and ability with an integrated curriculum that runs on a two-year cycle.

Martin is this year's Teacher of the Year for the Lafayette School District. Teaching since 1972, fresh out college with a Bachelor of Science in Education from University of the Pacific in Stockton, she came to Lafayette and never left. Although she initially worked at Lafayette Elementary School, she's been teaching at Burton Valley Elementary School since 1979.

Students from across Lafayette who score exceptionally well on the Otis Lennon School Abilities Test, more commonly known as the OLSAT, are invited to participate in AIM class. Rachel Zinn, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, explains it best, "AIM is for cognitively able students. Carroll does a great job and her students thrive on project based learning."

Her students clearly love her, describing her as very enthusiastic about everything, a great imitator and enjoy her nearly unlimited supply of funny stories. One young man comments, "She figures out everyone's learning style," another chimes in "She's not strict, but won't let you get away with anything." Out of the blue from across the room Martin responds, "I have eyes in the back of my head."

Martin has developed a number of positive strategies that keep the group on task, from the "refo-

ocusing area" to the very popular "SPD" or student planned day - earned via points for 100% of the kids turning in homework - or points earned by receiving a compliment from another teacher. Daily P.E., simulations and her "no surprises" policy are also highlights from the kids' point of view.

"My all-embracing philosophy about teaching is, we are here as teachers for the success of students in their education and not their failure. My students need to be met where they are academically, they need to be challenged, and they need to be prepared for their future. To do this, their learning needs to be experiential, hands-on, and full of student engagement," says Martin.

"Teaching has been a lifetime commitment that has brought me joy, satisfaction, and challenges. Each morning I get up and do what I want to as a career, and I have always told myself that the day I do not want to go to work is the day I should quit. So far, after 39 years that hasn't happened. I feel extremely fortunate to have found my calling and to be able to live out my dream," said Martin.

She generously gives credit to full-time aide and student teacher Gail Nugent, "I couldn't do it without her." The pair has developed an organizational rhythm and keen understanding of the students. Also offering assistance are regular parent volunteers in the classroom to help manage paperwork and assist with projects.

"Carroll is an excellent teacher and takes pride in knowing each of her students and teaching them individually to their strengths," said Burton Valley Principal Sue Rusk. "Her extensive knowledge of the curriculum, organizational skills, ability to challenge her students along with her instructional strategies provides our students with a winning program for success. We are so very fortunate to have Carroll at Burton Valley School and proud of her nomination as Teacher of the Year for the Lafayette School District."

Submit stories to schooldesk@lamorindaweekly.com