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Merriewood Children's Center Founder Retires



Merriewood Children's Center founder Diane Kisner
Photo Kristin Kisner

After 31 years as one of the pioneers of school-aged child care in the local community, Lafayette's Merriewood Children's Center founder Diane Kisner retired today,

June 6. Kisner founded Merriewood with partner Gretchen Johnsonbaugh in 1981, opening its doors to children ages 2 to 12. Kisner began by teaching and directing, but as time went on she spent more time doing administrative duties, said long-time Merriewood teacher and school-age director Bonnie Sivesind, who has worked with Kisner since the Center opened. "She's done a great service to the community. She's a very forward-thinking person and likes change," she said. "She has always looked to see what will work better."

Located near Burton Valley Elementary School, Merriewood Children's Center has seen thousands of

children walk through its doors over the years – whether in its nursery school or its before- and after-school program. "We're now servicing the second generation of graduates," said Sivesind, who noted that several of her 10 grandchildren attended the Center. "Kids that went here are sending their kids here, and some even work here. Many of Diane's grandchildren went through the Center as well."

Kisner sold Merriewood to long-time teachers Kevin Meany and Mim Bazzell, but continued to work at the Center alongside the children afterward. "She has such a heart for kids," Sivesind said. "That's what we'll miss most." *J. Wake*

St. Perpetua Students in "Music Man Jr."

Submitted by Monica Chappell



Photo Liz Haggerty

Charismatic con-man Harold Hill and his boy's band hit the stage May 10 and 12 at The Del Valle Theatre in Walnut Creek,

with more than 20 students from St. Perpetua School in Lafayette serving as cast and crew in Meredith Willson's *The Music Man Junior*. The production was directed and choreographed by Renee DeWeese and Rena Wilson of the Lamorinda Theatre Academy. The *Music Man* is one of the world's best-loved and most often produced shows. It featured a dazzling All American score with a handful of the best known songs of all time. With its wonderful humor and darling costumes, this small-scale production was performed to a full house and concluded to thunderous applause from the audience.

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TEEN SCENE

Change Those Bittersweet Memories

By Youngjoo Ahn

High school is hard enough without moving the summer before freshman year. Getting used to the rushed pace of passing periods, lugging back-breaking textbooks, and rigorous life-or-death tests, like the AP and the cursed SAT, is difficult any time, even when surrounded by people you've known since elementary school. Being plunged into a new community right before high school makes this transition even more challenging.

High school is notorious for cliques, bullying upperclassmen, and judgmental teens. To survive and thrive the four years of study requires the solace of true friends. But how do you make friends in a new location when people don't even know your name, and really don't care to?

"Moving in general sucks, but leaving friends is the worst part," said Miramonte sophomore Hanna Abruzzo. "Outgoing people definitely have an advantage when it comes to adjusting to new surroundings."

Some teenagers deal with the upheaval with a positive outlook. Sophomore Yurika Kazama has moved to three different countries because of her father's job. Despite the difficulties of moving frequently, often without warning, Kazama tries to make the best out of her situation. "Once you move you realize what you truly miss and love about a place. You learn a lot of things about yourself when you adapt to a new place. Moving to Lamorinda as a sophomore was incredibly demanding but the community has been really welcoming," said Kazama.

After attending private school for eight years, Izzy Fasheh transitioned to Miramonte High School. "I felt nervous, and a little worried about coming to a new school," said Fasheh, currently a sophomore. "I'm finding that public school is more diverse and less strict. There are fewer rules and you can wear what you want. I didn't know what the people were like or how they'd react to me. The good thing about moving schools was meeting new people and learning about the Lamorinda community."

Adjusting to a foreign neighborhood with radically different people is usually overwhelming, especially combined with the additional burdens of freshman year. Adopting a positive, outgoing attitude to change seems to be the cure for the bittersweet memories left behind. By reaching out, getting involved, and nurturing friendships, social skills are developed and broadened. Plus, adapting to a new environment at an early age is good practice for that giant leap after senior year called "college."

Youngjoo Ahn is a sophomore at Miramonte High School. In her spare time, she enjoys experimenting in the kitchen, skiing, and taking pictures with her Polaroid camera.

Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, Cynthia@CynthiaBrian.com.

The opinions expressed in Teen Scene are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

A Very Special Flag Comes from Afghanistan to Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



Al Archangel and Tom Westernoff holding the framed flag at the karate studio in Moraga
Photo provided

Flag Day commemorates the adoption of the United States flag on June 14, 1777. For Al Archangel, June 14 has a special significance; it reminds him of July 4, 2011 when, as a reserve Lieutenant Colonel deployed for six months in Afghanistan as a mission commander, he flew an American flag during combat operations in honor of his karate 'sensei' and friend, Tom Westernoff. "I wanted to honor Tom because he is such a great role model and has brought so much into my life as well

as the lives of many others in Moraga," said Archangel, who presented the flag to Westernoff this spring.

Archangel, a Moraga dad who's raising two teenagers with his wife Carol Shenon, started his professional life in the military. After several years serving as an active duty officer, he went back to civilian life as a software engineer. But he didn't want to end the service to his country. "As a young man, I looked up to my older brother who had made this career choice," said Archangel. "I thought it was a privilege and loved serving. Going into the reserves afterward was a natural thing for me."

Being an Air Force Reservist, Archangel trains with his unit every month and could be called upon to serve if needed. But the monthly commitment was not enough for him. "I wanted to serve again in active duty," he said. So he signed up for six months in Afghanistan.

Abroad, he was stationed at a

large military base in southern Afghanistan and his missions had to do with "finding bad guys" and providing over-watch of transport routes. Without adding too many details about his deployment, he shared some thoughts and memories: "Most of the men and women over there were very young. Being a father of teenage kids, I was definitely one of the oldest," he said. "The climate and conditions were pretty harsh, and there were a few times when the situation became quite dangerous."

While Archangel enjoyed doing his duty, he said it was no picnic. "The military made things as comfortable as possible for us," he added. "We could call our families every day, there was some recreation on the base, and we had a few special privileges."

One of these privileges was the opportunity to fly an American flag on an actual mission in honor of someone. "I went to Tom's karate

dojo out of curiosity," said Archangel. "I learned a great deal there and love the values and practices that are taught to adults and children alike." Archangel said the discipline and rigors that characterize the martial arts coincide with his philosophy of life and honor.

For Westernoff, it was a great honor to receive such a meaningful gift. "I will hang it in the front of the dojo so that we always remember," he said. He too believes that the hard work and dedication of all service men (and women) mirror the principles of karate-do. He encourages everyone to stop by The Karate & Fitness Place karate dojo in the Moraga Shopping Center to check out the framed American flag.

"A sincere thank you goes out to Lt. Col. Al Archangel and his team for their role in protecting our freedom," Westernoff said, "and for acknowledging the personal benefits gained through martial arts training."