

Local Community Groups Help Bring Curriculum To Life

During the formation of Grace Academy three years ago, the Board of Directors had a vision: create a comprehensive community school that would leverage the strengths of local institutions. By combining the energy, professionalism, and talents of other educational, arts, health and social service organizations, Grace Academy could create sustainable conditions for powerful teaching and learning. That vision began to unfold even prior to opening in 2010. Relationships with leading high schools Ethel Walker, Miss Porter's, Loomis Chaffee, and East Catholic were formed. Grace

Academy also partnered with renowned institutions including the Charter Oak Cultural Center, Hartford Food Systems, Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford, Soroptomists of Farmington Valley, Goodwin College, Junior Achievement, South Congregational Church and others.

In its second year, Grace Academy deepened these

relationships and developed new connections with the Hartford Stage Co., Harriet Beecher Stowe House, The Artists Collective, PricewaterhouseCoopers, University of St. Joseph and the University of Notre Dame Greater Hartford Alumni



The cast of Grace Academy's first dramatic production, "The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon."

chapter. Each organization helped bring the school's curriculum to life. Actors taught 5th graders the secrets of improvisation. Sixth graders learned from local artists. A former women's basketball athlete engaged 7th graders on setting goals. Through these supplemental immersion experiences, students are developing a deep understanding of the arts, literature, finance, journalism,

marketing, nutrition, religious perspectives, entrepreneurship, and civic issues facing urban communities. The power of these interactive partnerships allows students to make personal connections with their academics, thus deepening their understanding of the world.

The vibrancy of these collaborative relationships is helping inspire critical thinking, and allowing students to find academic and other kinds of personal success, and stay committed to themselves and their communities. Greater Hartford's non-profit institutions have shared

their knowledge, fostered personal connections, and inspired in each girl a thirst for greater knowledge.

In this issue, we highlight some of the stories our partners bring to Grace Academy. Through collaboration we grow as educators and we inspire and energize one another in our journey to deliver quality instruction.

Soroptomist International Leads Cooking Club



From left to right, Chit Po and July Maldonado presenting their homemade mini-pizzas in Cooking Club with moderator Carol Gould looking on.

The Soroptomist International Chapter of Farmington Valley has been a dedicated supporter of Grace Academy for more than two years. Soroptomist volunteers have included: professional photographer, Diana DeLucia, who takes photos of each girl on the first day of school; Martial Arts instructors Kathleen Oyanadel, Dorien Boonvanstade and Julie McNeil; fundraising supporters Tracy Scala and Sue McGann; and Cooking & Nutrition Club Leaders Carol Gould, Linda Terry, Kathleen Oyanadel, Dorien Boonvanstade and Ilona House. The Grace students especially enjoy the Cooking Club's treats and healthy meals created with everyone's effort in South Church's large kitchen.



July Maldonado and Kyoe Paw making yummy apple crisp.

Charter Oak Cultural Center brings theater to GA



The Charter Oak Cultural Center provided funding for drama teacher Karen Adamson to lead a drama introduction club in the second quarter. Adamson, so enamored with the students, decided to stage the school's first play and held auditions in March followed by a demanding schedule of acting drills and two-hour rehearsals designed to shape the students into young thespians. The show, *The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon*, combined all 209 Grimm fairy tales in a fast-paced, rollicking theatrical ride. Two narrators and 15 cast members retold classics like *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* and other fairy tales in a wild, free-form comedy with lots of audience participation and madcap fun. The Charter Oak Cultural Center initially began working with Grace Academy in 2010. Rabbi Donna Berman of the Charter Oak Cultural Center sent her good friend Cantor Joseph Ness to Grace Academy to lead a 10-week choir club.

Angelica Cornejal, who had to play four characters in the final scene of the Spectaculathon, poses with one of her many props...pink hair!

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) adopts Grace and Covenant Prep

Keith Hubert, John Livingstone, partners, and other leaders from PricewaterhouseCoopers invited co-founder Lindsey McPhee from Grace Academy to speak to the PWC employees at their annual Christmas celebration. This entrée led to a series of activities that began with a financial literacy workshop based on PWC's curriculum that's aligned with the Common Core Standards. Then in May, over 20 PWC employees took time away from work to help Grace Academy build closets, organize and catalog books, paint classrooms and clean. Another 40 or more employees hosted our students, along with the boys from Covenant Prep, to a day of dance, music and performing arts with professionals from The Artists Collective. A few weeks later, PWC donated bicycles to the school which were awarded to the winners of an essay contest from each grade.



Grace girls and Covenant Prep boys learn dance steps from instructors at The Artists Collective, hosted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Hartford Stage Models Arts Integration Strategies



From left to right, Kyoe Paw (obstructed), Paw Ta Shu and July Maldonado performing tableau in a scene from the holocaust story, *Number the Stars*.

Two actors from the Hartford Stage Company brought to life the emotionally moving holocaust story, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, during a visit to the school in March of 2011 and 2012. Both actors involved each student in tableau performances that depicted scenes from the novel. This form of "arts integration" allowed Grace students to gain an appreciation for drama and help prepare them for a reading lesson to follow. In the week following the Hartford Stage Company visit, students read the novel together with their teachers. This year, the Hartford Stage hosted a second session for the Sojourner Truth (6th) and Maria Sanchez (7th) classes featuring the book *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes.



Community Service at Saint Patrick-Saint Anthony's. L to R: Maya Tardif, Azoya Clarke, Sabrina Williams, and Kierrah Harris.

Community Service

Community Service is an essential learning component of the Grace Academy experience. Students here have performed service with Ethel Walker students at Riverfront Recapture and Hartford Food Systems and, in the spring of 2012, four student volunteers helped serve meals to homeless individuals at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church in Hartford. The students would arrive at 4:00 p.m. to serve sandwiches, coffee or lemonade, and would help make sandwiches for future meals. The smaller service sessions allowed students to work closely with adult volunteers and with soup kitchen visitors.

East Catholic students lead retreats and Clubs

East Catholic High School students led two sessions of classical ballet, sculpture, photography, and voice lessons this year as part of a service initiative designed to bring students from the two schools together. For two years, students and teachers from East Catholic have devoted their time and services to lead retreats, coach, tutor, and host "Tuesday Clubs" at Grace. Bridget Oei, a remarkable young woman from East Catholic helped lead two quarters of Classical Ballet along with voice lessons (pictured here).



Voice lessons with East Catholic student, Bridget Oei.

Marion Anderson's art work recognized at National Law Day



On Friday, May 18, the Marion Anderson (5th grade) class was recognized for their participation in the National Law Day art project and were invited to the Federal Court House where their art work was placed on display. Justice Dominic J. Squatrito initially nominated Grace Academy for the competition. Judges congratulated the Grace Academy students for their work and Chief Judge Alvin W. Thompson, so impressed with Azoya Clarke's painting, requested that it hang in his office following the art show. The Anderson class has also been invited to return this fall to sing at an upcoming Naturalization ceremony.

Fifth grader Azoya Clarke poses next to her painting which was later moved to Chief Judge Alvin Thompson's chambers.

Junior Achievement (JA)

Grace students received a little business 101 from IBM volunteers who taught entrepreneurship, financial literacy and workplace readiness as part of a Junior Achievement program. IBM's dedicated professionals delivered a curriculum to help prepare GA students for the business world by showing them how to create jobs to make their communities more robust and how to apply entrepreneurial thinking to their careers. The lessons and activities engaged small groups and the whole class and students learned the value of contributing to their communities. Junior Achievement invited Jessica Hariprasad and Ximena Franco to speak at last year's annual fundraising dinner. Jessica also participated in a Junior Achievement PSA radio commercial and served as the Master of Ceremonies at JA's annual fundraising breakfast on May 15.



Left to right, Jessica Hariprasad, Ximena Franco, and Ceanna Diaz at the Junior Achievement's annual fundraising breakfast, May 15. Jessica was the Master of Ceremonies.

Teacher Profile: Lauren House



Lauren House was one of four “founding” teachers at Grace Academy. Our teachers are vital to student success – they work with students nine hours each day, 11 months a year. Lauren taught fifth grade English Language Arts, fifth and sixth grade social studies, and fifth grade advisory. After completing her two year commitment as a ND

AmeriCorps volunteer, she moved to Cambridge to pursue a Masters in secondary history education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education; inspired, we believe, by founder, Lindsey McPhee, who taught at Cornelia Connelly middle school (a *Nativity Miguel school*) for two years before using her Education Award for a Master’s at Harvard.

Lauren received her Bachelor’s degree in Mass Communication and Political Science from the University of Delaware in 2010. During her years as an undergraduate, she was a teaching assistant for three courses and interned for Connecticut Public Radio, where her responsibilities included producing four morning news shows for WNPR, interviewing, editing and assisting with field reports, and producing promos. Lauren has also interned for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut. She’s also travelled extensively, and has attended and presented at several symposiums and conferences in Washington, D.C., Richmond, VA, and in New Delhi, India.

What motivated you to pursue a Master’s degree at Harvard?

My grandparents escaped from Hungary during the Russian invasion of the 1950’s. When asked to define their greatest motivation for immigration, they responded that those who

did not identify with the Communist party were not allowed state education for their children. I see how profoundly satisfied they are with the choices and sacrifices they made, if just because their children and grandchildren were able to pursue higher education in America.

Why did you choose to work at Grace Academy?

In the United States, we often view education as the great equalizer. With a proper education and hard work, any student is capable of climbing the socio-economic ladder. In actuality, our country’s education deficit has left millions of talented students by the wayside. While our country debates how best to reform our education system, schools like Grace Academy have opened up across the United States, eager to get the ball rolling. I joined the Grace Academy staff in June of 2010, because I have never before met a set of individuals so dedicated to providing our youth with the high quality education they rightfully deserve.

What did you gain from your experience at GA?

My two years spent at Grace Academy absolutely changed the trajectory of my life. I discovered that teaching is one of those careers where the learning never stops, not for the students and not for the teacher. Every year I spend in a classroom I grow more compassionate, more knowledgeable and more aware of the world around me. It is an absolute pleasure facilitating learning and watching students develop intellectually and socially over the course of a year. At Grace Academy, each day is full of small, wonderful victories.

I am so grateful to have had access to so many astounding educational opportunities throughout the course of my lifetime. The “American Dream” does exist, and it is the responsibility of the adults of the United States to provide all children with an education to match their ambitions.

Volunteer Profile: Theresa Anzaldua

The beauty of Grace Academy lies in the stories of dedicated individuals who give their personal time and talent to make our young school successful. One volunteer stands out among all the others for the sheer impact she is making on the school and the lives of our students. Theresa Anzaldua was introduced to us through her Soroptomist colleague, Sharon Alleman. Theresa, a graduate of Harvard Law School, brought her legal acumen and advocacy skills to bear on the maze of bureaucratic paperwork relating to Federal title funds, eRate, and Hartford Public School entitlement programs such as busing and nursing. During Grace Academy’s crucial first year of operation, Theresa developed important vital relationships, wrote letters, made phone calls, hand-delivered documents... and then, hosted a fundraising party at her and her husband, Ricardo’s, home; all out of her love for the Grace students. Here is a recap of Theresa’s accomplishments for Grace Academy:

- Obtained approval for a school nurse through the Hartford public school system with referrals for 7th-grade students to obtain free physicals, screenings and immunizations
- Applied and received funding for Grace Academy from the *No Child Left Behind* Federal Grants Programs, Titles I, IIA and III
- Successfully applied for the inclusion of Grace Academy in the Neighborhood Assistance Act, a tax credit program for corporate donors

- Compiled demographic reports for the *NativityMiguel Network*, as a first step toward securing Grace Academy’s inclusion in the network
- Compiled a handbook of income requirements for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program, detailing income eligibility of students applying to Grace Academy
- Helped create a Board of Directors Manual, drafted a board resolution, and researched loan deferments for teacher applicants
- Connected UConn Professor Sulin Ba with Grace Academy whose students developed interactive pages on the school’s website *pro bono*
- Connected Grace with a professional grant writer whose former projects involved multi-million dollar grants and who assisted the school free of charge
- Inspired neighbors to donate musical instruments and support the school financially
- Traveled to New Haven to become well versed with the Federal eRate program and helped secure rebates for telephone and internet services, along with cell phones and discounts on technology service contracts
- And hosted a fundraiser for Grace Academy at her home

Theresa Anzaldua is a true example of the concept the *Power of One*.

Sports Wrap-Up

7th Grader Breaks School Hoops Scoring Record

Grace Academy's **Thi Ri Soe** broke the basketball team scoring record in a double-header March 22 against rival Solomon Schechter. Soe, a 7th grader, poured in 16 points on 8 for 14 shooting in the varsity contest (won by Schechter 38 to 22) and 8 points on 4 for 10 shooting in the opening junior varsity game in which Grace tied Schechter 12 to 12. Her point total was perhaps most impressive given that all but one of her field goals were outside jump shots.

The 11-year-old maneuvered for position, using multiple head and ball fakes at times to create space against her taller opponents. At one stretch in the second quarter of the varsity game, Soe scored three consecutive 15-foot jumpers from the elbow, including a fall away bank shot.

Until this day, Soe had scored one basket in Grace's previous six inter-squad games. "I feel good but I'm really tired," she said afterwards. But after a little rest Soe was back at school and on the court the next day.

Soe's coach, Bryan Cote, attributes her success to great discipline in practice. "Thi Ri really gives her whole self. She's very smart and always listening and working on the fundamentals of shooting and dribbling and defense. We knew it would finally click for her," said Cote.

Soe's effort represents the highest individual game point total in Grace's brief two season history; her two-game total included 12 rebounds, 5 steals and 4 assists in 44 minutes of action. Soe began playing basketball at age 10 and had not played a competitive game until Grace's opening game in January 2011.

Grace Academy's girl's basketball team competed in seven games in the 2011-12 season, five more than its opening year docket. The team traveled to play Windsor Locks Middle School, Achievement First,



Coach Bryan Cote reviews team strategy with basketball team.

Watkinson, Breakthrough Magnet and Solomon Schechter. "It's a great experience for our players to compete with Grace's students – we look forward to playing them – they have great potential, terrific enthusiasm," says Mike Cunningham, director of athletics at Solomon Schechter. All of the teams on Grace's schedule include athletes who've played competitive basketball since they were 4 or 5 years old, whereas all of Grace's players competed in their first official game as middle schoolers. "It's tough to lose but these are great experiences for these young women – they have a chance to compete and learn teamwork and the challenges of playing when you're down, plus the great thrill of a comeback," Coach Cote said.

The team experienced a near comeback during the highlight of the 2011-12 season against Watkinson in West Hartford. Down 16 to 2 after one quarter, a group of Grace players led by **Diangellys Rodriguez, Sha Lay Paw, Melanie Mejiaswasyl, Victoria Vazquez, and Tanasia Marrett** led the team back, scrapping for loose balls on defense, tenaciously grabbing rebounds and dribbling with their eyes up. Speedy Diangellys, a 5th grader, stole a pass at midcourt and scampered 30 feet for an uncontested layup to cut the lead to 16-9 then co-captain Vasquez, a 6th grader, buried the team's first-ever 3-pointer from the right arc with 1:10 to play in the first half capping a 10-0 run. Halftime score: Watkinson 16, Grace Academy 12. "But we've never won Coach Cote," Marrett said in the halftime huddle, the kids hunched over exhausted from the frantic first-half finish. "But you just did," Coach fired back. "Let's keep building on that."

Editor's note: If you have any questions about the Grace Academy basketball or athletic program contact Coaches Caitlin Clark at cclarke@graceacademyhartford.org or Bryan Cote at bcote_18@hotmail.com.

Grace Academy Adds Lacrosse to Spring Schedule

In addition to an intramural softball and spring track program, Caitlin Clarke, Athletic Director, sought ways to add lacrosse to the athletics program. Thanks to Tom Steinle, a former women's lacrosse coach, and Lisa Parson, Varsity Women's lacrosse coach at Loomis Chaffee, enough lacrosse equipment was donated to start our first team. It's a great sight watching 25 Grace students appear through the trees at Bushnell Park on Monday afternoons, 15 carrying softball gloves, the rest holding Lacrosse sticks. Grace's Colleen Krmpotich would run the team members to Bushnell Park for skills training, including how to hold the stick, catch and toss a ball. After a season of practice, Watkinson School hosted the team for an inter-squad scrimmage. Grace's players were mixed with Watkinson's team for a competitive, and memorable experience. In between action, Watkinson coaches and players--many who began playing lacrosse when they were 7 or 8--worked closely with Grace girls to explain game rules and strategies. Plans are underway to play competitive lacrosse in 2013.



Grace girls playing their first lacrosse game at Watkinson School.

Become a Guiding Star by sponsoring a student's education

The Guiding Star Student Sponsorship program provides more than just an opportunity to give to a worthy cause; it offers a personal connection to our students who grow in many ways due to the generosity of the sponsor. By sponsoring a student you are providing the gift of education, of friendship and of hope.

The Gift of Education

Your tax-deductible gift of \$5,000 to Grace Academy will provide an annual sponsorship for one student. This is the most powerful gift a young girl can receive, given the long-term impact it will have over her lifetime. Sponsors can be individuals, families, groups of friends or co-workers or any group that is interested in coming together to contribute directly to the education of one of our students.

The Gift of Friendship

As a Guiding Star Sponsor, you will be introduced to one of our students via a letter. You will receive letters throughout the academic year from your student telling you of the progress she is making, as well as her challenges or general life experiences at school. We want you to feel connected to your student and her to you. This connection will foster the development of character and maturity in your student who will recognize that

someone cares and believes in her. There will also be opportunities for the sponsors and students to come together at school sponsored events. If you visit the school, you will be welcomed by your student and, if possible, she will spend some time with you and help show you what life is like at Grace Academy.



Where friends are made! - Genesis Rodriguez, left, and Lisa Caraballo.

The Gift of Hope

Grace Academy's objective is to reach children from the lowest income neighborhoods of Hartford and help them achieve success through education. *A Guiding Star Student Sponsor* generously donates a gift of \$5,000 or more to support the education of the student he/she sponsors. By sponsoring a student, you will make a difference in her life. Your support will provide your student with hope and the expectation that she can succeed. Regardless of race, religion or background, every student can achieve, and your gift will provide her with the opportunity that she truly deserves. We

invite you to be a part of the mission of our unique school with your generous contribution.

Contact Matt Fitzsimons or Tracy Smith to learn more about becoming a Sponsor (860) 263-7535.