

Write Around Portland comes to Helensview

By Jane Elder Wulff

Several students in Helensview High School's "Drama Teens With Talent" have gathered over lunch to tell me about their first "Write Around Portland" ten-week writing workshop last fall. Principal **Kris Persson** introduces me to Wyatt, who stands towering and silent as she warns me he might not stay.

"It's okay if you leave, Wyatt," she says.

He turns to leave, and she adds, "But just not yet."

Wyatt takes his place at the table next to me, a big grumpy Buddha. Kris is called away. The rest of us tell our names. I have already read their work in Write Around Portland's latest published anthology, "The Sparkle In the Grit," and Wyatt's piece is echoing in my brain. Here's the beginning:

What is my life like now since I was 15?

Shoot, I am still the same, still angry, and still very much annoyed, and still don't care.

I hate people, I hate everyone, the only ones I can really stand are the ones close to me, the ones I know, the rest...well who really cares now, am I right?

I ask how the workshop got started, not looking at Wyatt, wondering how I can keep him from leaving. The students hesitate. They see my problem, but they're not sure they can trust me.

"I was home on the couch with a broken ankle," Brittney offers. "When I wasn't at school, Abby called" - her teacher at Helensview - "and came to my house and brought me into the group."

Without a word, Wyatt gets up and leaves. The rest of us look at each other.

"I don't like to talk about people behind their back," I tell them, "but I've read Wyatt's work. If things really look that bad to him, why does he bother to write about it?"

That's when I learn that Wyatt has done me a favor. Explanations tumble out. "Wyatt wrote the whole time," the students assure me. "He came to all the meetings. He could write anything, all in ten minutes, all the details. He never stopped. He had a lot to say."

"But why? If he doesn't care, why write?"

"It's another way of expressing his feelings," says Debra, and the others chime in, heartily agreeing. "We all got to know each other a lot better," they tell me. Cynthia, full of confidence, sums it up: "He knows he likes to write."

I was talking to my boyfriend on the phone. He told me it was time to tell my father. I was too afraid. I wasn't prepared for what was going to happen next. I put my boyfriend on hold and then stepped outside of my room and into the living room. I saw my dad. He was in the kitchen boiling water to make ramen noodles. I was so afraid, but I knew I'd have to tell him anyways.

I said, "Dad, I'm pregnant." He turned around and looked me in the eyes. His eyes were all red. I could just see all the anger pouring out of his eyes. He asked, "You're pregnant?" At the time I was fourteen. ...

Cynthia's baby is now a year old "and he's a good kid. His smile makes my day." Reading her piece in the Write Around Portland anthology makes her smile too.

None of these students expected to see their writing in print before Write Around Portland came to Helensview. Some of them were already writers. Others didn't think they could do it.

"Write Around Portland does reinforce the idea that everyone is a writer," says **Sara Brant**, an editor at Lewis and Clark College and volunteer facilitator for the Helensview workshop.

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Write Around Portland *(continued from page one)*

Since its founding in 1998, this nonprofit organization has sponsored nearly 200 such workshops for people affected by HIV/AIDS, illness, addiction or disability, adults and teenagers in custody or living on the street, seniors in foster care “and others who might otherwise not have access to the power of writing because of income, isolation or other barriers,” according to the anthology’s introduction.

Funded by a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiative called Reclaiming Futures, which works to bring responsible adults into the lives of at-risk teenagers, Multnomah County began partnering with Write Around Portland last year on workshops at Helensview and the Juvenile Justice Center, with more to come.

Program coordinators learned about Helensview through the county and approached the school with their proposal. After some preliminary work last summer, the students met and wrote for two hours every Wednesday. Write Around Portland provided free journals, pens, bus tickets, childcare and snacks.

“The goal of Write Around Portland is not to get people to write our way, but to encourage and facilitate them to write their way,” says Sara. “I was really impressed with Helensview. They were serious about the fact that I was joining their community. They didn’t take that lightly.”

The students formed a strong connection with Sara. “We bonded with her real bad,” says Debra, a poet who brought Wyatt into the group. “She said, ‘Don’t call me teacher’ - she was more like a friend, not telling us what to do.”

“She made us a cake!” says Brittney in wonder and delight.

They tell how the first day they set their own rules of conduct - all positive feedback, no cell phones, no cursing, be on time. (Write Around Portland has a rule against “hate speech,” and the students took it one step farther to rule out cursing during group sessions.)

Sara gave them journals and pens, a powerful invitation which they clearly loved. She kept the writing prompts coming and did all the exercises along with the students, taking breaks and shifting gears to keep the energy going.

“I’m normally quiet, but it helped me to grab one of my five journals,” says blue-haired Joey, who is anything but quiet right now.

“I could write what I’m feeling. Writing is a good way to express yourself and get to know yourself better.”

“This group knows me better than my own family,” says Brittney. “Sara made it for me. I can look at any object and I can write about it.”



Helensview principal Kris Persson meets with Write Around Portland participants

“It’s like a family,” says Cynthia.

A key exercise called “When you were 15,” with its own website, has helped spark the Reclaiming Futures initiative in Portland with support from public figures like Kim Stafford of Northwest Writing Institute, Commissioner Sam Adams, and Portland Mayor Tom Potter. Brittney says, “That was the piece that I really opened up on.”

“I got lucky on that one,” Joey agrees. “Sara okayed it for me to write about what happened when I was 12.”

Kris comes back, and they all describe how the workshops convened at a downtown church last December to read their work, how Debra tripped over Shawn coming offstage after reading her powerhouse of a poem called “He’s Got a Real Woman,” how everyone lost it then, laughing until they cried. They’re laughing again now just thinking about it - remembering, too, how much sadness they heard that night, and how scary and good it felt to read aloud and listen to everyone’s stories.

Will they keep writing? Definitely. “These are students reporting on life,” Sara assures me later. “Their lives are vibrant with resonant lessons on a bigger level. They’ve found out they can speak to other people in the way that anything that’s written has the potential to do.”

Helensview students in the 2005 Write Around Portland workshop and anthology are Debra Miller, Brittany Misho, Tonya Dreger, Joey Dreger, Shawn Glancy, Cynthia Saetern, and Wyatt Salcido. Two of these students will speak on Jan. 25 at the annual meeting of the Coalition for Equal Access for Girls, along with keynoter Renee Mitchell of *The Oregonian*.

For more information about the programs mentioned in this article, see writearound.org, reclaimingfutures.org, and whenuyouwere15.org.

Matt Fleming comes into his own at Alpha

By Jane Elder Wulff

MESD's alternative high school proves to be the right fit for a young man on the move

Two years ago, as a sophomore at Reynolds, Matt Fleming stood at a crossroads. He had earned just four out of a possible eight credits, with barely passing grades. Feeling lost among 2,800 students at one of the state's largest high schools, he found it hard to stay focused. "There were lots of distractions," he recalls. "I didn't really care."

He cared enough, however, to seek out a school counselor and get on the waiting list for Reynolds Learning Academy, a smaller program within the school that helps keep at-risk students on track toward graduation.

Then a spot opened up at MESD's Alpha High School in Gresham. "I never knew about this," says Matt. "I found out about it because friend of mine came here." Alpha's school-to-work program, small classes, and practical goals turned out to be just what he was looking for. A few weeks after his first visit to the Reynolds counselor, Matt transferred to Alpha.

Perfect grades follow transfer

Since then he has earned perfect grades in all his classes and made the most of every opportunity to prove himself a leader. He brought the Alpha basketball team (newly official as part of the alternative school league) up to speed last year, and he was retroactively made captain by the team's coaches - principal **Peter Kane** and science teacher **Michael Lancaster**. He mentored younger students as an Outdoor School student leader and an education assistant in Alpha's middle school classroom.

Michael put him in charge of Alpha's Conservation Crew in his junior year, and this year he is spearheading the school's Youth in Government program, now preparing with high schools across Oregon for mock legislative sessions in Salem next month. Matt, who will present a bill as a senator, had a chance to brush up on his public speaking when the city council recently honored him as a Gresham Great Young Citizen.

"I went with him and his dad to the courthouse to see Matt being honored," recalls **Bill Trafton**, whose VW and Porsche repair shop in Gresham is in its 14th year as a school-to-work job site for Alpha students.

"The police chief came up to us afterward and said, 'Hey Matt, thanks a lot for working on that law being changed' - gave him his card and said to call him anytime. I always tell my students to go out and change the world, and this kid's really doing it. I said to Bob, 'You gotta be a proud dad.'"

"I always tell my students to go out and change the world, and this kid's really doing it"

- **Bill Trafton, longtime Alpha School to Work Employer**

Same person, but a chance to blossom

Matt's teachers and mentors don't view this change in him as a transformation. He's the same person he always was, but they've watched him blossom.

He wasted no time learning the ropes at his new school. "Matt has a terrific likability factor going for him," says language arts teacher and Youth in Government adviser **Jennifer Stone**. "Among the students, teachers, people at job sites, he hasn't had a conflict since he's been here. He's just really a likable person."

Michael recalls Matt "starting out on the quieter side, always helpful and conscientious. He did a great job in his first term in my

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Matt Fleming and Alpha principal Peter Kane



Matt Fleming *(continued from page three)*

class last year, and the second term he was one of the veterans and a leader, setting positive role models for the new students. At Outdoor School he got great reviews from the staff. He came back and taught me a thing or two about soil science. When I'd say 'dirt,' he'd say, 'That's not dirt, that's soil.'"

Matt wanted to do the Youth in Government program last year and was disappointed when he had to defer it. This year he was first to sign up, rallying support and bringing in expert information. Working on a Measure 11 amendment to exclude minors, he invited former legislator Joann Bowman to provide advice. He timed her visit to happen after the students had drafted their bill, while they were writing their speeches.

"He researched the previous work on this law, found her name and set it all up," says Jennifer. "I didn't even speak with her until the day she came to class. He checked with me along the way, and I knew he'd follow through. He's a leader in more ways than one."

At the same time, Matt was working on finding funds to lease a full-court practice gym for the basketball team. His coaches tell how, with no athletic budget, they were building a team from scratch.

"Matt was very selfless in his play, always positive and team-oriented," says Michael. "He honed his skills playing for Reynolds over the summer, and back at Alpha in the fall he had an agenda and goals for our team. He came to us for some ideas, and within a month he was writing an MESD Foundation mini-grant."

Efforts yield success

Matt's proposal was funded for \$750. Now the team practices on a full court at West Gresham Elementary. "It was a huge boost for him last fall when the grant funding, our Alpha Crew canoe trip, and the Great Young Citizen award all coincided," says Michael. "I had the honor of introducing Matt to the city council, thanking his parents for giving him the ability to pursue his academic interests."

Matt's own explanations for his success have to do with Alpha's small size (75 students), clear focus, and shared sense of purpose. "We do academic work half days and then go to job sites," he says. "This way you don't just get a diploma, you also get the experience you need. By the time you're out on your own, you know how to do it. Dad and Bill both say they wish there had been something like this when they were in school."

Alpha has given him a chance to mature in a positive setting where teachers and students work together as colleagues, on a first-name basis, with common goals. His experience there has prepared him for an engaged and productive future. After graduation this spring he plans to attend Mount Hood Community College, where he'll explore various career paths. Later he might go on to Portland State, develop his Spanish, pursue automotive studies in Japan. "If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't be graduating this year," he says - but that's history. Now his options are wide open. Building on relationships of mutual respect and support with his parents, peers, teachers and other caring adults, Matt Fleming has learned at Alpha how to make the most of his life.



MARTIN LUTHER KING 1929 -1968

Martin Luther King would have been
77 years old on January 15, 2005

*His legacy lives on in his words, deeds,
and the lives of the people moved to service by his example.*

Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve.

You don't have to have a college degree to serve.

You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve....

You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Above and beyond:

briefly recounting good deeds and random acts of kindness by MESD staff

Quietly and often without much notice, MESD staff continue to make life better for students. Here are a few recent examples of those among us who have gone "above and beyond."

Health insurance outreach specialist and an attentive nurse combine skills...

Special Needs Nurse **Christy Fawcett, RN**, received a call to come to a Functional Living Skills room and to see a student with some unusual marks on his hands and feet. She looked at the student and determined a call home would be needed. The student's mom indicated she knew of the sores and had been treating them at home with some herbs. Christy advised mom that the child should be seen for medical attention. Mom stated that she did not have insurance and did not know what to do. **Otoniel Rosales**, SHS outreach specialist worked with mom to get the child on the Kaiser medical plan. Mom took the child in; he received the necessary care and is doing much better. The classroom teacher was kept updated on the information and the nurse participated in the IEP meeting to assist the family in accessing their new insurance plan. The Disabilities case manager for the student was made aware of the SHS involvement and was very happy that MESD could assist the family in this manner. The student's case worker assisted mom in getting an appointment for a complete physical for the student.

Curriculum & Student Assessment Services

receive praise...The following is taken from the Assessment Issues Brief that was shared recently at the Oregon Department of Education's Office of Assessment and Information Services (OAIS) Advisory Committee:

"OAIS is extremely proud of the feedback we're receiving regarding the process for the ESD contracts for the support assessment system. We anticipate few changes in this process for the 2006-07 school year." Multnomah ESD is one of the three lead ESDs managing this statewide support effort.

Appreciation for MESD School Improvement Specialist **Penny Plavala's** efforts to support teachers come from around the state... In a letter received recently, Teri Houghton, a teacher in Grants Pass wrote:

"...I also wanted to let you know how much I appreciated the Technology Enhanced Student Assessment (TESA) hints you sent out to us. Although I used TESA last year (for the first time) I wasn't very satisfied with the way I prepared my students. The ideas you sent really helped! Some of my students tried highlighting paragraphs as they went along, and that seemed to help them focus. Many made use of the note card, particularly as they were looking for information in charts."

Opening hearts at Arata Creek... November was a big month for the school as Educational Assistant **Jackie Lenox**, with the support of his Church, City Bible, and School Nurse **Pam Pestalozzi**, with the support of her son's Boy Scout Troop 174, coordinated obtaining and distributing all the essentials for a fine Thanksgiving Holiday for many of our needy families. Franz Bakery provided rolls, bread and pastries for the baskets as well. Many staff helped distribute the food boxes to our students' homes.



Hospital Education Program collaboration helps students...

A collaborative effort at Shriners Hospital resulted in a significant breakthrough for a student. Building on the work begun by MESD Assistive Technology Specialist **April Kilstrom**, the Shriners occupational therapist staff and current MESD Teacher **Eric Prasoloff** designed and built a switch that allowed a student to utilize and manipulate a computer for the first time. The student had always enjoyed computer games and stories but was unable, due to her orthopedic impairments, to use a mouse or other control devices. She can now click through choices, stop and start programs and has some control over her environment.



Amateur Photography Showcased In Local Fundraising Effort for Outdoor School

Photo of the Year 2005, an annual photo contest showcasing amateur photography from around the world and benefiting the Multnomah Education Service District Outdoor School Program is underway. The contest culminates in an awards gala on January 28, 2006 at the Wieden and Kennedy Building in the Pearl District of downtown Portland.



Over 1,000 photographs taken from around the world were submitted to this year's competition. A panel of five judges reviewed the photographs and selected 100 semi-finalist pictures. These photographs have been posted to the event website where an online voting open to the public is currently taking place (www.photooftheyear.net). The top 10 finalist photographs will be unveiled at the Photo of the Year Awards party, and the winning photograph will be chosen that evening by attendees to the event.



Photo of the Year 2005 Awards Party

Wieden and Kennedy Building

224 NW 13th Ave, Portland, OR 97209

7:00 PM - 11:00 PM • January 28, 2006

Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. 400 person capacity. Advance online registration is highly recommended.



MESD's Outdoor School Program is approaching it's 40th anniversary of offering natural science education to students in our community. The program has positively impacted 300,000 sixth grade and high school students during its legacy. However, recent budget cuts within local schools now pose a real and definite threat to the Outdoor School Program. MESD is seeking creative and sustainable funding alternatives to keep this program alive. Photo of the Year has evolved into one of those alternatives and it is projected that about \$8,000 will be raised from this year's event.

Photo of the Year is the brainchild of John Waller of Uncage the Soul Productions, a Portland based video and photography company. John, a former Outdoor School staff member, began the contest in 2002 as a way to showcase great photos taken by his "weekend warrior" friends armed with new digital cameras. The quality of the photos and the enthusiasm of early participants made it clear to John that the contest had potential for more than just fun. Over the past four years, Photo of the Year has grown into a fundraising event for the MESD Outdoor School with over a dozen local business sponsors, hundreds of photos submitted from around the world, and a \$400 cash prize to the winning photographer.

For information about Photo of the Year 2005, to vote for semi-finalist photographs, or to register online for the awards party on January 28, visit the website at www.photooftheyear.net.

Photo of the Year 2005 Sponsors:

- Julee's Gorge Tours
- Jill Myers Realty
- River Drifters
- The Dalles Ranch
- On Foot Films
- Pro Photo Supply
- Mazamas Climbing Club
- OutdoorsNW
- Young Professionals of Portland
- Next Adventure
- InkPromotions
- Richard Allen
- Kevin Meyers Photography
- The Western Culinary Institute

"The Alfrey Family in recognition of the important educational opportunities provided by the MESD Outdoor School to the children of Multnomah County"

Even more ways to support Outdoor School

The 40th birthday party for Outdoor School is in the planning stages! Outdoor School has been running since 1966 and turns 40 in 2006. The event promises to be a huge success. Also, the annual Outdoor School auction is schedule for May 5th and will be held at the Doubletree Hotel next to Lloyd Center.





A Word From Wellness and Safety

The New Laws Around Tobacco Products and Schools



As you are now aware, there have been recent changes in Oregon State laws regarding tobacco use in school facilities. This administrative rule has given school districts specific directions to prohibit tobacco use in any form as well as the promotion of tobacco products (OAR 581-021-0110). As of January 1, 2006, school districts had to establish policies and procedures to implement and enforce this rule for students, staff, and visitors.

For the purpose of this rule “tobacco” is defined to include any lighted or unlighted cigarette, cigar, pipe, bidi (natural cigarettes), clove cigarette, and any other smoking product, and spit from tobacco, also known as smokeless, dip, chew, and snuff, in any form.

The rule defines a school as any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented, or chartered by the school district, school or public charter school. It also includes school grounds, athletic grounds, or parking lots and at any on or off campus district sponsored events. This rule also applies to Education Service Districts as they are considered part of the public school system. Tobacco “paraphernalia” means any clothing, bag, hat or other personal item that displays, promotes or advertises a tobacco product. We understand how difficult this new change may be for our employees who do smoke. Research indicates that “Help Lines” do work. You may want to give one of them a try:

- Oregon Tobacco Quit Line (*free*) 1-877-270-STOP
- Spanish 1-877-2-NO-FUME
- TTY 1-877-6534
- www.oregonquitline.org
- American Cancer Society 1-800-ACS-2345
- American Lung Association 1-800-Lung-USA
- American Legacy Foundation 1-866-66-START
- (For pregnant smokers)

10 TIPS TO QUIT SMOKING FROM THE AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION

- Get rid of all your cigarettes, lighters, and ashtrays. Wet down cigarettes so you won't dig them out of the trash.
- Change your daily routine so you won't want to smoke from habit.
- When craving cigarettes, remember the 4 D's: Drink water, Delay, Deep Breathe, Do something else.
- Carry gum, hard candy, or toothpicks to keep your mouth busy.
- Tell people you've quit; most people will support you.
- Don't worry about feeling sleepy, grouchy, or dizzy. These (withdrawal) symptoms will pass.
- Remind yourself why you're quitting
- Eat regular meals. Sometimes people feel like smoking when they are really hungry.
- Tell yourself you ARE a nonsmoker now.
- Reward yourself for going days or weeks without smoking.

Ask the Wellness Expert

Dear Wellness

I have been feeling sad and tired lately. It has been raining a lot lately, so I stay indoors, sometimes watching too much television. I have books to read and I try to go for short walks during the brief periods when the rain slows. But, I still am feeling sad. Any suggestions?

Ima Inarut

Dear Ms Inarut

It can be difficult to stay chipper during the rainy months in the Northwest. It sounds like you are doing the right things. Good health advice always includes recommending a visit to your healthcare provider when you are feeling ill. Dr. C Everret Koop, once Surgeon General of the United States gave some excellent advice on cheering up: Giving is good for you. Acts of kindness such as serving meals at a homeless shelter, running to the pharmacy for a sick friend, or lending emotional support to a significant other may help people live longer, a recent study concluded. Do something kind and compassionate for someone else each day and you'll reap health benefits as well.

Classes and Activities Available:

Job Stress and Your Health

The longer he waited, the more David worried. For weeks he had been plagued by aching muscles, loss of appetite, restless sleep, and a complete sense of exhaustion. At first he tried to ignore these problems, but eventually he became so short-tempered and irritable that his wife insisted he get a checkup. Now, sitting in the doctor's office he wondered what the verdict would be.

"Tell me about your work," Dr. Samuels asked David.

David responds, "How much time do you have? I feel like I am always caught between what the customer wants and company policy. I'm not sure whom I'm supposed to keep happy. We all seem to be so uptight and tense we don't even talk to one another. To make matters worse, my mother's health is deteriorating. No wonder I'm in here with migraine headaches and high blood pressure. A lot of the staff are seeing the employee assistance counselor and taking stress management classes, which seems to help. But sooner or later, I will have to make some changes".

David's situation may sound a little exaggerated, but job stress is real and it does affect our health. One school of thought recognizes the differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress - In other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a problem for someone else.

The concept of job stress is often confused with challenge, but these concepts are not the same. Challenge energizes us psychologically and physically, and it motivates us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When a challenge is met, we feel relaxed and satisfied. Thus, challenge is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work. The importance of challenge in our work lives is probably what people are referring to when they say "a little bit of stress is good for you." According to the NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) view, exposure to stressful working conditions (called job stressors) can have a direct influence on worker safety and health. Individual and other situational factors can intervene to strengthen or weaken this influence. David's need to care for his ill mother is an increasingly common example of an individual or situational factor that may intensify the effects of stressful working conditions.

Stress sets off an alarm in the brain, which responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The nervous system is aroused and hormones are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles. This response (sometimes called the fight or flight response) is important because it helps us defend against threatening situations. The response is preprogrammed biologically. Everyone responds in much the same way, regardless of whether the stressful situation is at work or home.

Short-lived or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk. But when stressful situations go unresolved, the body is kept in a constant state of activation, which increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. Ultimately, fatigue or damage results, and the ability of the body to repair and defend itself can become seriously compromised. As a result, the risk of injury or disease escalates.

What Can You Do?

Identify the problem The best method is to explore the scope and source of a suspected stress problem. Hold discussions, collect data, and analyze to identify problems and stressful conditions.

Design and Implement Interventions. Once the sources of stress have been identified and the scope of the problem is understood, the stage is set for design and implementation of an intervention strategy. Target the source of stress for change, propose and prioritize intervention strategies, communicate these strategies to all involved, and implement.

Evaluate the Interventions. Evaluation is an essential step in the intervention process. Evaluation is necessary to determine whether the intervention is producing desired effects and whether changes in direction are needed. Evaluate both at short and long intervals, look at the perceptions of the stress and health affects, be objective and refine or redesign your intervention plan as needed.

Early signs of stress are usually easy to recognize. But the effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems-especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders. Get in touch with your stress, define it, and work on interventions to resolve the issues at hand. Your health depends on it!

For more information on job stress and your health:

National Institute for Occupational and Health Safety

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html>

Conversational Spanish Classes

The first 10 weeks of conversation Spanish classes are almost finished. We will be continuing for another 10 weeks. If you were not able to make the first 10 week session, please feel free to sign-up now as there will be a session for starters, and those continuing on.

The next round of classes will begin on February 13th and 14th (Mondays and Tuesdays) and continue for 10 weeks. More specific information regarding class dates and times will be sent upon registration.

2006 Wellness Challenge and New Fitness Center

It's that time of year again; a New Year means a healthy new start. The Wellness Committee announces the 5th annual Wellness Challenge. Staff members can set a weekly goal for 6 weeks starting March 6th, 2006, and individually track the wellness activities they choose to participate in. Having a well balanced is a combination of activities. This might include a healthy diet, exercise, stress reduction, relaxation, meditation, and many other activities. Watch your email and next month Interactions for more details and registration information.

The Wellness Committee sought input from all MESD employees and after much investigation and consideration, the exercise/fitness room is being revamped and updated. The room is being freshly painted and new exercise equipment is on order, as well as periodicals on health and fitness for MESD staff use. Stay tuned for updates on the grand reopening.

Around the Agency

MESD staff attending and presenting at conferences

As time and funding allows, MESD's staff and Board sharpen their skills, pursue continuing education, share expertise and increase community partnerships by attending local, regional and national meetings. Here's a summary of some recent activities:

Special Needs Nursing Seminar

The 10th Annual State Feeding Seminar: Regional and Statewide Services for Students with Orthopedic Impairments, was held December 5 and 6, in Wilsonville and hosted by **Diana Roberts**, occupational therapy specialist, Douglas ESD. Feeding teams and related services staff from across the state attended this 10th annual seminar. Five MESD Special Needs nurses and one Supervisor attended the seminar. Two of the MESD Special Needs nurses were presenters, and one nurse was on an expert panel and received a special award:

Joann Muller, RN presented: A Gourmet Day: A Feeding Experience with the Portland Public Schools Feeding Team.

Marcia Ruark, RN presented Evaluation, Treatment and Process: Case Study Review, Analysis and Panel Discussion. Marcia and the PPS Feeding Team presented a comprehensive review of a challenging feeding team case that was managed by the second PPS Feeding Team.

Candice McBeth, RN was a member of the expert panel for the presentation Evaluation, Treatment and Process: Case Study Review, Analysis and Panel Discussion. Candice was presented the "Silver Spoon" for her expertise in the development and writing of the Feeding Team Manual, used by feeding teams throughout the state.

Healthy Kids Learn Better Partnership SHS Director **Barbara Neely** attended the Healthy Kids Learn Better Partnership - Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Prevention Subcommittee in Salem. It was a brainstorming session to identify priorities for pre-service and in-service actions/content related to this topic. It was a reminder of need to consider other persons beyond schoolteachers as persons who can provide this information to students.

MESD represented at PPS in-service School Health Services was represented at the Portland Public Schools in-service dealing with cultural sensitivity and post trauma. The in-service originated from the influx of persons coming from the hurricanes in the south. It was a positive for SHS that they were invited along with counselors from the district.

Law Conference Human Resources Director **Kelly Schwartz** and Deputy Superintendent **Ron Hitchcock** participated in the 25th Annual Oregon Law Conference in Eugene, jointly sponsored by OSBA, COSA and the University of Oregon. It was beneficial to network with other districts and ESDs while getting current opinions from attorneys, the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) and Government Standards and Practices Commission (GSPC). Current events and publicity regarding Oregon ESDs were hot topics.

Association of Education Service Agencies Conference MESD, through the support of business partners, was able to present breakout sessions at the recent AESA Conference. Participants from several other states commented on the quality of the presentations and comments by MESD participants. The entire event got excellent reviews and presented an invaluable opportunity to glean from and share with others in the ESA community. Board members **Janice Gratton**, **Ron Chinn**, **Geri Washington**, **Sy Kornbrodt**, **Ken Kisser** and **Harry Ainsworth** attended along with **Ed Schmitt**, **Ron Hitchcock** and **Barbara Neely**.

Commission for Children, Families and Communities MECP Coordinator **Nancy Anderson** participated in the Multnomah County Commission for Children, Families and Communities Board retreat on December 8th. The board reviewed goals in three areas focusing on young children and youth. Recommended action steps for the Board were determined at the meeting.

Head Start review MECP supervisors participated in the Portland Public Schools Head Start Federal Review. MECP received a letter of appreciation from PPS following the review, documenting the high level of community partnership offered by MECP on the behalf of children, families, and staff.

Board visits with program... Recent opportunities to visit MESD sites were rewarding for the MESD Board of Directors. The Present Tense Open House, TEC Open House, an Outdoor School tour, and Hospital Education Program tour all provided heart-warming insights. MESD's people and programs make a huge difference in the quality of life for the districts, staff, students and families we serve.

Columbia supports Alpha... A lpha school nurse **Debbie Andrews** received a very generous donation from Columbia Sportswear of winter coats and pants. She sorted and distributed them to students at Alpha as well as area schools. They were much appreciated. Debbie has also been coordinating services for students. Her expertise, compassion and helpfulness in acquiring resources and providing care exhibits a spirit we can all be proud of.

Salmon release successful... The Alpha science class recently released Salmon at Oxbow Park with second grade students at Hollydale Elementary. This is the third year Alpha Conservation Corps students successfully raised salmon from eggs in aquariums in their classroom here at Alpha and at an elementary school. Every week, Alpha students visited the class, teaching them about the process of raising salmon, the salmon life-cycle, and the human impacts on Northwest salmon populations. The project culminated in a trip to Oxbow Park to release over 500 salmon into the Sandy River.

Alpha students meet requirements... Out of nineteen seniors, one has already finished her credit and project requirements. Another five are finishing up their requirements and will graduate within four or five weeks of the beginning of the New Year. Thirteen are currently employed and out of these four were hired by Alpha jobsites.

Outdoor School numbers are in... Another successful fall Outdoor School session ended with a total of 2,761 sixth graders and 710 high school student leaders attending. Area schools have submitted their site and week requests and the spring Outdoor School scheduling process has started. The final spring session schedule will be complete in January.

On the trail again... Registration information for MESD's fourth grade program, Oregon Trail Overnight, has been sent to area elementary schools. Registration began on January 5th. This program will use the Kiwanis site located near Mt. Hood. The program anticipates a high volume of response due to last year's record participation.

Around the Agency *continued from previous page*

Grant being prepared... Department of Instruction (DOI) staff are working with component districts on a proposal in response to a recent Request for Proposal (RFP) issued by the Oregon Department of Education. ESDs have been invited to submit proposals for region-wide capacity building projects to support districts with the 2007 diploma and Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) requirements. Current plans are to develop a "train-the-trainer" model while drawing from the expertise that already exists in the county. The maximum grant award is \$30,000.

TEC gifts tags draw praise... Educational Assistant **Stacy Lawton** at MESD's Training and Education Center spearheaded the gift tag project during November and December. Employment Training Technician **Steve Brown** came up with the idea and Stacy ran with it. A total of 15 students from the FLS program at Alpha, the East County House and TEC worked with numerous staff in the TEC Vocational Center. They produced 130 bags of 15 tags each totaling 1,950 tags. Each bag was sold for \$1. The students began the project November 28 and sold all bags by December 12.

Parents gather... The Multnomah Parent Action Committee, MECP Parent Action Committee and MECP administration conducted the monthly parent meeting on December 13th. Topics included respite care and stress reduction. Many parents participated with positive outcomes for all.

MECP growth continues... MECP's December 13th census indicated 1,217 children currently being served and 858 additional children who have received services throughout the year. This is a total of 2,075 children and families served the past year. The program thanks Technology Services for assisting us in assigning SSID# (Secured State ID Numbers) to all children through a batch method, including those children that transitioned to kindergarten or closed throughout the year (the additional 858 that required SSID #). This type of collaboration is what makes MESD a great place to work.

High tech, high touch... Arata Creek's Computer Club has been started with two sections. In the first section four students are working with robotics. With part of the MESD Foundation mini grant money, two Lego Robotics kits were purchased. Students are learning to program the robots to perform simple tasks. In the second section of the Computer Club four students are putting computers together. They will also install an operating system and other software needed to run a computer. Four staff were also trained in the Linux operating system to teach students. When they are done with the computers they will be able to take them home. The computers they are building were donated from an organization called Free Geek. They take old computers, strip them down and donate them to schools and other non-profit organizations. Campus Safety Monitor **Dustin Fleisher** was responsible for coordinating the contact with Free Geek.

Documenting the impact of school nurses... Oregon Center for Nursing and Oregon First are applying for a grant to study data on the number of school nurses, case loads, etc. Consultant **Chris Campbell** of the Oregon Center for Nursing, contacted **Barbara Neely** regarding the need for a reliable, routine data collection tool. Chris will be making a recommendation to Northwest Health

Foundation (NWHF) that school nurses be involved in helping to develop the tool and, hopefully, have some impact in an ongoing mechanism within the state. It is hoped that the data gathered can be used to advance school nurse positions as an important resource for children's health.

Immunization clinics held... School Health Services organized and participated in David Douglas and Reynolds Middle School Regional Immunization Clinics resulting in 106 children receiving 202 doses of vaccines needed for school attendance. The Immunization Program staff prepared and mailed 9,555 parent notification letters for PPS and East County schools.

News article highlights school nurses... USA Today's front page news article on the shortage of nurses putting school kids at risk, focused on the role of school nurses (http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-12-13-school-nurses_x.htm). As a result, the "Today Show" had a morning segment on school nursing. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) moved quickly to use the opportunity to have the NASN president on the show and interviews with school nurses. This has long been a dream of NASN and shows that with patience and persistence dreams do come true. Of course, the dream now is that this helps decision makers with heightened awareness for resources and policies for children's school health services and especially school nursing.

IFAS 7i upgrade moves ahead... Representatives from technology consultants Plante-Moran came from Michigan to the Superintendents Council meeting Friday, December 16, to present their findings from the Request For Information (RFI) for financial system software. The Council approved a motion to accept MESD's proposal for the upgrade.

Medicaid Administrative Claiming heads north... MAC surveying for the State of Alaska, now an MESD customer, is in full swing. They will survey a sample from their pool of approximately 12,000 school district employees. The sample pool for Alaska is made up of over 1,800 employees from 41 different districts; from Bering Strait School District to Yukon Flats School District. Using the MESD Surveying System has resulted in Alaska achieving about a 33% increase in claimable time from the methodology they previously used. They expect that their annual claim total will increase by over \$5 million dollars per year. MESD expects to receive approximately \$200,000 from Alaska annually for services provided.

Network Services studies ways to save \$\$\$... Technology Services is enhancing the current phone system to use "voice over IP" between MESD's sites which may reduce costs for programs. They have started a project to study new phone system technologies.

Student Services upgrades servers... MESD's student services team spent two weeks upgrading the eSIS database servers to Oracle 10g. TS upgraded the production servers to Oracle 10g during the holiday break. The application servers are scheduled to be upgraded during spring break. At this time, older Macintosh equipment will not be able to run the eSIS application. Districts have been testing and planning for this major event.

Interaction is published every other week by the Office of Public Affairs for the employees of Multnomah Education Service District. Suggestions for stories, news, photographs or announcements are gladly accepted. Contact Mark Skolnick (503-257-1516). Contributors to this issue: Debby Kelly, Mark Skolnick and Jane Elder Wulff.