

# Guilderland

CENTRAL SCHOOL  
DISTRICT

## Creating a caring community

*Guilderland welcomes Dr. Ellen deLara*

**A**s part of its programming for the 2003-04 school year, the Guilderland Task Force on Bullying and Harassment recently presented two workshops with Dr. Ellen deLara of Cornell University, aimed at raising awareness of bullying in the school community.

The first workshop, presented on the evening of October 16, was designed for parents of students in grades K - 12. Held in the Guilderland High School auditorium, nearly 80 community members participated in the event.

At the second workshop, held October 17 as part of a Superintendent's Conference Day, more than 1,000 district staff members gathered at the high school to examine the issue of bullying in both the Guilderland community and throughout the nation. The goal of the event was to discuss bullying in a non-threatening, conversational way.

The workshop began with several poignant "firsthand" accounts on the effects of bullying and harassment, as told by three current Guilderland students and Board of Education member Linda Bakst. These individuals shared stories on how the impact of bullying behaviors are long-lasting - whether you are the bully, the victim or the bystander, no one involved in a bullying situation is unaffected.

Following these testimonials, Dr. deLara took center stage. "My goal today is to bring some of the kids' voices directly to you, and to let you know what they are thinking about," she said. "We must hear their voices on this particular problem, because it is from them that we are going to discover solutions."

She spoke for more than an hour, covering topics including: the myths of bullying, statistics regarding the perceptions and realities of bullying, and what

school communities can do to address bullying and harassment in an effective way.

"Closely look at your community and what is 'acceptable,'" deLara said. "In order for there to be true change, communities need to realize that the well-being of a child in school belongs to everybody." ♦

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### Bringing history to life



Students at Lynnwood Elementary School recently built a replica of a traditional Iroquois village. Above, students examine feathers, pelts, and fruit inside of the longhouse they constructed on the school grounds.

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**Empowering  
all students  
to succeed in  
the 21st Century**



## Riding for a cure

*Guilderland students, staff, and parents join annual Tour de Cure*

**F**arnsworth Middle School eighth grader Ben Watsky may only be thirteen years old, but he has already learned one of life's important lessons: through determination and enthusiasm, one person really can make a difference.

Ben, together with a special group of Guilderland students, teachers and parents, has helped to raise more than \$27,000 throughout the past three years for the American Diabetes Association.

**"The Tour encourages children to set personal goals, and riders have a real sense of pride and accomplishment when the event is completed."**

– Joann Gigante,  
5th grade teacher at  
Westmere Elementary School

Since the time he was in first grade, Ben has been a participant in the Stillwater Tour de Cure - one of the American Diabetes Association's annual fund-

raising events. The Tour bike ride, held every June out of Stillwater Central School, helps raise awareness and funds to help fight, prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of all people affected by the disease.

Ben first joined the Tour de Cure in 1996 with his father, who participated in the ride regularly with his co-workers. "He realized at a young age that it was a good thing to do," said Jackie Watsky, Ben's mom.

Ben soon made it his mission to encourage others to join him in supporting the fight against diabetes. "He saw that kids really can make a difference," she said.

### Welcome the Wildcats

Joann Gigante, a fifth grade teacher at Westmere Elementary School, had also been an active participant in the Tour de Cure event when Ben mentioned his past riding experiences in her classroom at the beginning of the 2000-01 school year.

"My grandfather passed away at the age of 55 from diabetes, and I was really surprised that someone so young would have such a



Pictured above are Wildcats team members and Guilderland students (from left to right) Sam Blair, Corey Smith, Mubarak Abdullahi, Ben Watsky and Alex Verelli, just prior to the start of the 2003 Tour de Cure event in Stillwater.

commitment to this cause," said Gigante. "I was inspired by his participation and so I said, 'Hey, let's ride together!'"

It was not long before the two decided to start up a riding and fund-raising team from Westmere – the Westmere Wildcats – that included a handful of students, staff and parents. In their first year, the Westmere Wildcats raised nearly \$3,000 for the American Diabetes Association by collecting pledges and through various other fund-raising events including bake sales and Beanie Baby sales at local retail stores.

In their second year, the Westmere Wildcats had increased their membership to about 15 riders and had nearly tripled their previous fund-raising total – bringing in \$8,700 for the event.

In 2003, 33 Wildcat riders ("Westmere" was recently dropped from the team name as more students from other school buildings began participating) hit the road and raised an impressive \$15,000 for the event.

Out of the nearly 60 teams (528 riders) who participate annually in the Stillwater Tour de Cure event, the Wildcats are the only student team. They have finished as one of the top three fund raising teams in the event for the past two years.

### Rewards of riding

There are numerous benefits to riding in the annual Tour de Cure event. Obviously, money raised through fundraising is invaluable to helping prevent and cure diabetes. But perhaps more special are

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the personal rewards of the riders, as they benefit from knowing that they have taken the time to help others.

"The children learn how to reach out to others and to have compassion and empathy," said Gigante. "The Tour also encourages children to set personal goals, and riders have a real sense of pride and accomplishment when the event is completed."

For parents participating with their children in the Tour de Cure, it is a great way to spend some time together. Families have the opportunity to work as a team to educate the public on the need for diabetes awareness.

"More and more parents and family members are choosing to ride with the students each year," Gigante added.

**2004 Tour de Cure**

The Stillwater Tour de Cure is a ride, not a race. It is geared for cyclists of all ability levels, as participants can choose to follow courses ranging from 10 miles to 100 miles in length. Individuals and teams are recognized for their commitment to the fight against diabetes and for their fund-raising efforts, not for winning the race.

The 2004 Tour de Cure event will take place once again out of Stillwater Central School, on Sunday, June 13, 2004. Riders will tour parts of Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties, depending on the length of the course chosen.

**"It's a great way that a kid can help others and hopefully make a difference in someone's life."**

– Ben Watsky,  
8th grade student at  
Farnsworth Middle School and  
Wildcats Team Captain  
on why he rides in the  
Tour de Cure

Students, staff and parents interested in joining the Wildcats in their fourth year of participating in this exciting day of exercise and fun, should contact Wildcats team captain Ben Watsky at [jwatsky@nycap.rr.com](mailto:jwatsky@nycap.rr.com) or Westmere Elementary teacher Joann Gigante at [gigantej@guilderlandschools.org](mailto:gigantej@guilderlandschools.org). Additional information about the event can also be found online at [www.diabetes.org/tour](http://www.diabetes.org/tour). ♦



## Guilderland welcomes Neil T. Sanders, Assistant Superintendent for Business

Guilderland's new Assistant Superintendent for Business Neil Sanders is hard at work preparing for the 2004-05 budget year.

Although he's been in his position for less than a month, Sanders has already met with all of the building principals to assess the current year's budget situation and to formulate ideas for creating next year's spending plan.

"The budget in place this year seems to be meeting current district needs," Sanders said. "And although we are expecting a challenging budget year in 2004-05, it is my goal to ensure that the district remains in a sound fiscal state and that we are able to once again successfully meet the needs of our school community."

Sanders has worked in the field of education for more than 16 years. He comes to Guilderland most recently from the Ichabod Crane School District, where he served as the district's business administrator for the past two years. Prior to that, he worked in the North Colonie School District as the assistant business administrator and in the Bethlehem School District,

where he was the administrator for data processing.

Sanders succeeds Robert Paquette, who retired in October after 11 years of service with the district.

It was Guilderland's real commitment to education that initially attracted him to the assistant superintendent for business position, Sanders said. As a resident of the Guilderland School District for the past several years, Sanders wanted to have "a positive impact on the educational experience of both my family and my community," he said.

A native of Schuylerville, NY, Sanders is a graduate of Schuylerville High School and The College of Saint Rose, where he earned a bachelors degree in business administration and completed a minor in computer science. He also received a certificate of advanced study in educational administration from SUNY Albany.

Sanders and his wife, Colleen, a teacher in the Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk School District, have three sons – Kyle, 11, Evan, 6, and Ryan, 3. Kyle and Evan are fifth and first graders, respectively, at Westmere Elementary School. ♦

## Bringing history to life

### *Building an Iroquois village*

► **F**or Lynnwood Elementary School fourth grader Clare Ladd, helping her classmates to build an Iroquois longhouse is something she will always remember. “It was very exciting, because I had never built anything like that before,” she said. “It made me feel like I was really an Iroquois.”

#### Planning a lesson for a lifetime

For the past five years, the entire fourth grade class from Lynnwood has worked together with teachers and parents on what has quickly become an exciting fall tradition: building a replica Iroquois village on the grounds of the school.

The annual weeklong project began in 1999, developed by fourth grade teachers Liz Augstell, Corrine Falope and John Miller as a summer curriculum project. The teachers’ goal was to create an interesting, hands-on learning experience for students that not only focuses on the historical facts of Iroquois life, but also encourages teamwork, communication and a host of other skills not found in the pages of a textbook.

“We had heard about a similar project taking place at another local school district and decided that it would be a great opportunity for our students,” said Augstell. “Studying the Native Americans of New York State is a part of the fourth grade social studies curriculum, but by actually building their own Iroquois village, the students are getting a unique perspective on how life really was several hundred years ago. They are living history.”

**“We all worked together as a team...and I even made a new friend that I didn’t have before.”**

– Kyle Dow  
Lynnwood fourth grader  
and “Iroquois chief”

Lynnwood Principal Jim Dillon agrees. “Building a longhouse is a very clear example of how history can be incredibly exciting,” he said. “And when students are emotionally invested in a project, say by being very enthusiastic to try something new, brain research shows that those students will learn and retain more information in the long run.”

#### Taking a walk back in time

The fourth graders at Lynnwood spend several weeks studying and researching the Iroquois in the classroom, reading legends and learning about their culture, before construction of their village begins. The students also visit the New York

State Museum Longhouse in Albany and participate in a program presented by the Scotia Glenville Traveling Museum on Iroquois life, to help them prepare for their upcoming project.

After discussing the role of leadership in Native American tribes, female students choose a male chief from each class, modeling the Iroquois’ matriarchal society. The children are then broken down into seven clans, and the building of the village begins.

Students, teachers and parent volunteers work together to gather and transport building materials such as branches, small saplings, large logs, and stones to the building site, which is located just alongside the elementary school



building. Nearly all of the materials used in the construction process are found naturally, in the woods surrounding the school, as students try to make their village as authentic as possible.

“We used things from nature that the Iroquois used in everyday life,” said student Clare Ladd. “We learned how to make things by hand that we actually make with machines today.”

When visitors enter the completed Iroquois replica village for the first time during an opening ceremony, they are greeted with numerous vivid reminders of a culture from long ago: fish and hide drying racks; a corn garden with a scarecrow platform; fire circles;

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and of course, in the center of it all, an eight foot tall longhouse.

Later in the week, the fourth grade "Iroquois clan members" offer informational tours of their grounds to other students and parents, explaining in detail the various elements of the village and discussing why each is important in Iroquois life. They also display several smaller projects, such as clan necklaces, cornhusk dolls, pottery, wampum, and maps, which they have been working on during their research and study of the culture.

"I was kind of nervous talking in front of the group at first, because I wasn't sure that I could answer all of their questions," said village tour guide and fourth grader Anna Van Patten. But by the end of her first presentation, Anna was excited to share her knowledge of Iroquois

life again. "I was definitely more confident," she said.

The weeklong project concludes with a closing ceremony, led by the "Iroquois chiefs," who are "unexpectedly" interrupted by "European" visitors. The "Europeans," played by Principal Jim Dillon, teachers Simon Levy and Dan Cordell, and school secretary Lea Byrne, approach the Iroquois with cloth, beads and mirrors, stating that they are interested in purchasing their land. The students then discuss the possible positive and negative impact of the Native Americans accepting the Europeans' proposition, which leads directly into the students' next unit of classroom study.

The site is then completely deconstructed that afternoon, leaving no traces of a bustling Iroquois village and providing a clean slate for next year's incoming fourth grade class.

### Carrying on a tradition

Building an Iroquois village is something all Lynnwood fourth grade classes look forward to doing year after year. It is always a successful project, with students, teachers and parents alike excited about this unconventional learning experience.

**"Students can pass a test, but if they do not leave our schools with a curious mind, if they do not know the enjoyment you can get from visiting a museum or from learning something new, then we have not done our jobs."**

– Principal Jim Dillon  
Lynnwood Elementary School

Teacher Liz Augstell believes that one of the reasons this lesson continues to be so popular year after year is that it lends itself to many different learning styles. "Some children are better at reading books and researching, while other students' strengths lie in building and creating with their hands. Still other children learn more easily by visiting museums and seeing artifacts up close. This project creates opportunities for learning in all of these

various methods," she said.

"By giving students opportunities to use their specific skills, no matter what they are, in an academic setting, they are more likely to pursue learning," said Dillon. "A project like replicating the Iroquois village gives children many avenues to use alternative strengths, and actually gives them the confidence to work on their weaknesses, as well."

The project also teaches students the benefit of working together as a team to accomplish a common goal, as everyone needs to work side by side to ensure that the village is constructed on time and in the most authentic way possible.

"By working together on the village in the fall, students from all of our fourth grade classrooms are able to share a common experience that they can carry with them throughout the rest of the school year," Augstell said.

Student Tyler Cullen was surprised by how willing his classmates were to lend a helping hand. "Everyone helped each other, even if they didn't know one another," he said.

"We all worked together as a team," said "Iroquois



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chief” and fourth grader Kyle Dow. “And I even made a new friend that I didn’t have before.”

But perhaps the most important lesson that the students learn while working on the Iroquois village, and one of the reasons why the project is brought back year after year, is that it inspires children to be excited by learning.

**“By being in an actual Iroquois village, I felt how they felt outside in the cold and I could relate to their life.”**

– Tyler Cullen  
Lynnwood fourth grader

Fourth grader Anna Van Patten never expected that social studies class would be quite like this. “Usually you just learn about things in the classroom,” she said. “It was a good experience to go out of the classroom and to just ‘do things.’”

“Students can pass a test, but if they do not leave our schools with a curious mind, if they do not know the enjoyment you can get from visiting a museum or from learning something new, then we have not done our jobs,” said Dillon. ♦



Emmy award-winning nutrition and health theater group FOODPLAY both educates and entertains at Farnsworth.

## FOODPLAY visits Farnsworth MS

On November 3, 2003, FOODPLAY Productions performed a program entitled, “*This Is Your Life!*” to all sixth and seventh graders at Farnsworth Middle School. The program, sponsored by the Family and Consumer Science (FACS) Department, is a national award-winning health theater show that promotes making healthy choices.

“*This Is Your Life!*” addresses the issues of nutrition, fitness, body image, eating disorders, tobacco prevention, peer pressure, stress reduction and media literacy. It combines thought-provoking drama, humor and motivational health messages to help build positive self-esteem in children. The goal of the program is to help students develop proper eating, exercising and health habits.

All of the issues presented in “*This Is Your Life!*” are being discussed in the nutrition portion of the FACS curriculum. ♦

## Sounds of the season...

### *Upcoming holiday concerts and musical events*

- Thursday, December 4, 2003 ..... FMS 8th grade concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Sunday, December 7, 2003 ..... Guilderland Chamber Choir/Burnt Hills Ontario, 3 p.m.  
@ St. George’s Church
- Sunday, December 7, 2003 ..... Altamont Victorian Holiday Celebration
- Tuesday, December 9, 2003 ..... Guilderland Elementary Concert, Part I, 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, December 10, 2003 ..... FMS 7th grade concert (with 7/8 orchestra), 7:30 p.m.
- Thursday, December 11, 2003 ..... GHS concert Part III, 7:30 p.m.  
@ SUNY Albany (Jazz & String bands, Chamber Strings and Choir)
- Monday, December 15, 2003 ..... Lynnwood Elementary concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, December 16, 2003 ..... FMS 6th grade concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, December 17, 2003 ..... Pine Bush Elementary concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Thursday, December 18, 2003 ..... Altamont Elementary concert, 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, January 13, 2003 ..... Westmere Elementary concert, 7:30 p.m.



*Forging ahead with our mission...*

## State of the District proves strong in 2003

At the November 4 Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Gregory Aidala gave his annual address to the trustees and the community on the state of the Guildersland Central School District.

"I am pleased to report that the state of the district is strong," Aidala said. "We continue to make progress in the work that we do with children and young people; and as one might expect, there remains much more work to be done. Still we are successfully moving forward with our mission of *"Empowering all students to succeed in the 21st century."*

Aidala pointed to Guildersland's dedicated district staff as the core strength of the district. "Teachers, supervisors, administrators and support staff, in both their daily and long term efforts, are committed to providing the highest possible level of services to our students," he said.

The Superintendent also mentioned a number of noteworthy district characteristics, programs and

initiatives that have contributed to the positive state of the district in the 2003-04 school year, including:

- 52 new teachers, 23 of who began their first teaching assignment in September. On average, the remaining 29 new teachers in the group numbered 5.2 years of professional teaching experience in other districts before coming to Guildersland. Thirty-eight have already earned their master's degree.

- Enrollment is stable – In the 2002-03 school year, K-12 enrollment was 5,667; In 2003-04, K-12 enrollment is 5,664.

- An impressive amount of staff development involving both new and veteran teachers, including a new mentoring program for supervisors and administrators called *Leaders Helping Leaders*. Note: 22% of Guildersland's supervisors and administrators are new in 2003.

- The redesign of the district web site, which now offers parents, students and staff easy access to important and up-to-date district news and events, including:

emergency school closings and delays, sports schedules, Board of Education information, teacher web pages and an *Ask the Superintendent* feature, bringing the schools closer to the community we serve.

- Improved programming on Guildersland cable channel 16, where each day community members will find a rolling bulletin board of information about upcoming school events and activities, as well as general educational programming, Board of Education meetings, and broadcasts of district initiated presentations.

**"We are successfully moving forward with our mission of Empowering all students to succeed in the 21st century."**

– Dr. Gregory Aidala,  
Superintendent of Schools

- The opening of a new transportation facility, with upgraded features that will allow our buses to run more efficiently than ever before.

- The faculty's continued commitment to helping all students not only meet but also exceed the New York State academic standards.

- Offering challenging new courses for students

including SUPA forensics, which is intended to provide an introduction to understanding the science behind crime detection by drawing from the fields of biology, chemistry, and physical science.

- An emphasis on creating a more caring school community, in part through the creation of the Guildersland Task Force on Bullying and Harassment. The task force has presented programs for both parents and staff in an effort to raise awareness of the issue and to promote bullying prevention programs and initiatives.

As the 2003-04 school year enters the second quarter, Aidala noted that the district's priorities have remained unchanged from the previous year. Guildersland will continue to keep the focus on students, setting high expectations for them and reinforcing the link between classroom learning and the support provided at home by engaging families.

"Education is cyclical; there is no end, no final resting point, there is always more work to do," said Aidala. ♦



## Award-winning author visits Westmere Elementary

Chris Raschka has been called an innovator in the field of children's literature. His books reflect his love of music (specifically jazz), as he transforms musical notes into visual elements such as kittens, raindrops and snowflakes.

Above, guest author Chris Raschka directs several Westmere second graders during their performance of his book, *Can't Sleep*.

During a recent visit with Westmere Elementary kindergarten, first and

second graders, Raschka talked about his creative process, saying that he is continually inspired by "the things I enjoy the most – music, language and friendship." He read a selection of his work to the students, before inviting several volunteers to join him in a "live production" of his book *Can't Sleep*.

Raschka has written and illustrated numerous award-winning books including the Caldecott Honor Book *Yo! Yes!* and its sequel *Ring! Yo!*; *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop*, *Mysterious Thelonious*, and *Waffle*. ♦

## Transportation Department receives \$55,506 NYSERDA grant

Thanks to the efforts of Transportation Supervisor Christine Sagendorf, the Guilderland Transportation Department was recently awarded a grant in the amount of \$55,506 from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), to purchase diesel oxidation catalyst technology that will reduce diesel emissions from several of the district's large school buses. Currently, all of the buses in Guilderland's fleet meet the EPA standards for safe emissions, and all but 33 of the large buses have catalytic converters that reduce emissions further than the law requires. Through this grant, the district will be able to upgrade the remainder of its large school buses so that all are above and beyond safe emissions standards.

By upgrading its fleet with this new technology, Guilderland is taking a proactive approach to creating a safer, cleaner environment in the Capital District. ♦

[www.guilderlandschools.org](http://www.guilderlandschools.org)

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## Guilderland

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