

The
News
from

Monticello

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Monticello summer school graduate overcomes and conquers

Road to success filled with detours

As the summer of 2008 slipped from present to past, one Monticello High School graduate tipped his hat in a good-natured, farewell gesture to his long and arduous journey.

With an endearing smile, Jordan Papacharalambous addressed his summer school classmates with an emotional message filled with encouragement.

"The future is now. By graduating today we have already proven that we can overcome any obstacle," said Jordan. "The doors of life are open and opportunity is waiting. Don't think negatively, feel proud of this accomplishment and get ready to explore!"

What his peers saw at the podium was the image of a confident young man ready to take on the world, but what they didn't know, was the struggle and strife that built his character and set his determination in motion. As a self-proclaimed "average student" Jordan's downward spiral began at age ten when his parents separated and then divorced.



Jordan Papacharalambous credits Monticello High School student services liaison Deb Fasce (right) as a special person in his life who helped push him to keep going when times got tough. According to Jordan, she always believed in him regardless of his circumstances, she gave him confidence and hope for the future, and treated him with respect. Also pictured is summer school AP, Jeanine Nielsen, who is the head science teacher at the high school.

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NEW CLUB REC BEFORE-SCHOOL PROGRAM BEGINS

The Club Rec after-school program for elementary-age children is available Monday through Friday at each of the district elementary schools. Activities include homework help, character education, sports, art and music. This year, Club Rec unveiled it's new before-school program, which runs from 7-9 a.m., and is also available at all four elementary schools. For registration and fee information, call 794-8830, ext. 6 or 783-7505.

MONTICELLO DISTRICT RECEIVES NATIONAL HONOR

The Monticello School District has been recognized for outstanding achievement in educational communication by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)

The district received two awards for its printed publications which are produced by communications specialist Renata Gittler. The NSPRA honors included an Award of Merit for Monticello's 8-page district newsletters and an Honorable Mention award for the 2007-08 district calendar. Winners were chosen from more than a thousand entries from across the country. This is the second year in a row the district has won NSPRA awards.

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Community Members,

It is my sincere hope your children had a great start to the new school year. October is always an exciting month in education - a time when students begin to get back into the rhythm of school. Our athletics program is well underway with increased student participation in fall sports and extra-curricular activities. Since the addition of our football program, at least 100 more students are participating in after-school activities this season. We are grateful that our programs have received such a high level of community support.

Music in Monticello recognized nationally

We are also pleased to announce that once again, our school district has been selected as one of the top 100 communities in the country for music education. With the expansion of our high school Fine Arts Academy, we anticipate further improvements and greater student involvement in the future. Congratulations to our music department for its outstanding work.

New academic programs making a difference

The College in the Classroom program is off to a fine start, as well. Student participation has significantly increased allowing more of our children to take college level courses while still in high school. Thanks to Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther securing us grant monies, we managed



to significantly reduce the amount of tuition many families have to pay for these classes. It is our firm belief that the best discipline policy a school can have is a great curriculum. As we continue to restructure the high school academies, we plan to infuse more college level classes. This will allow for increased student participation in upper level programs and the continued decrease in disruptive behavior. There is a definite connection.

Tough economic times ahead

We are very proud of the success of the academic and community progress our schools have made, but just like everyone else, we must also be mindful of the tough economic times we are facing. We need to prepare for what lies ahead. To that end, we are diligently working with our Board of Education, administrative staff and professional organizations to position ourselves to weather the impending storm. One of the first hurdles we will encounter is a possible cut in State aid in January 2009. That means we may not receive some of the money we were promised when we created our 2008-09 budget. Every year we rely on these figures to formulate our budget and set the tax rate. If we don't get that money, it will put us in a very bad financial position.

If Albany mandates us to give back some of our aid, we will have to carefully analyze our programs and possibly make some mid-year cuts. It is our hope that by being proactive, we will be able to absorb these potential cuts and better position ourselves for next year. In the foreseeable future, we will have to work together to make some difficult choices. Still, it is our belief that together we will be able to preserve our programs and continue to build towards the future.

Your opinions and ideas wanted

I invite and encourage you to contact me with any suggestions or ideas you may have about cutting costs. As always, my door is open.

Sincerely,
Dr. Patrick Michel

Teaching the Teachers: Eye on Professional Development



From left, RJK Middle School head teachers Sherri Blais (math); Tracey Orlan (ELA); Kyle Hoar (science); and Michelle Knowlton (social studies) worked together during the leadership seminar. According to Knowlton, she and her team of teachers encourage all their students equally, regardless of race or gender.

At this year's annual Leadership Retreat, district officials brought in hard-hitting professionals to discuss some ideas for addressing the disturbing reality that African-American and Latino boys are not graduating at the same rate as all other students. Even though Monticello is one of the few school districts regionally whose graduation rates are rising, once the data is broken down and analyzed, there is an apparent disproportionality in who is graduating. This statistic, which holds true throughout the country, is one that cannot be ignored in a school district like Monticello that has such vast cultural diversity. Through workshops on self-perception, multiple intelligences, the gender gap and cultural differences, the goal of the day was to not only raise awareness in the school leaders, but to give them solid tools for change. According to guest speaker Charlotte Gray, an education specialist from NYU who studies the disproportionality phenomenon, even slight adjustments in curriculum and teaching methods can sometimes make vast differences in student success.

This retreat is part of the conscious effort by Monticello School District's present administration to address cultural diversity issues. They have already begun a strong cultural diversification campaign to improve minority representation of their staff. The District is a member of the Minorities and Success Initiative which assists in recruiting highly qualified minority candidates. Officials are also aggressively seeking minority candidates for faculty positions, as well as for every level of employment within the educational community in an effort to match the diversity of the student population.

New Faces New Frontiers



Virginia Morse (right) recently joined Monticello High School's administrative staff as the new assistant principal for freshman and juniors. She comes to Monticello from the Middletown Central School District where she was an English Language Arts teacher for almost ten years. She has a Master's Degree from SUNY New Paltz and her SDA Certificate from Long Island University. She is a resident of Sullivan County and loves to play tennis, ski, fish and enjoy the outdoors with her black Labrador, Tucker. Also pictured is MHS's other AP, Mark Sutherland.



Cooke Elementary School welcomes Barbara Perkins (right) as its new assistant principal. She will also be the district-wide English Language Learner (ELL) Coordinator. She previously worked as an assistant principal, dean of students, literacy coach, AIS coordinator, ESL specialist, 2nd grade teacher and middle school math teacher for the New York City Department of Education. She holds a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education from NYU, and a Master's Degree in Reading and her SDA certificate from Mercy College. She is married to her husband, Christian, and has three children, Ashlie, Amber and Justin. Also pictured is Cooke Elementary School Principal Sandra Johnson-Fields.

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Summer school student: preparing for the future

He was taken out of the Monticello School District and bounced around for a number of years as his mother tried to build a new life. Trying to find his way, he lost interest in his school studies and just glided by from year to year without much effort.

“I’m the kind of student that never needed to study to pass my classes,” explained Jordan. “So I just set my standards low.”

As high school approached, things were getting tense in his mother’s household, so he moved in with his father and enrolled at Monticello High School. Back in his comfort zone, Jordan made himself a promise to try harder and do better in school. Although his intentions were good, he forgot his promise quickly as he became enticed by the social fun and excitement he found in hanging out with his old friends. But fear not, he knew he could pass his classes and that he had plenty of time to

get serious about his schoolwork or worry about graduating.

Then tragedy struck. In 2006, his mother was killed in a car accident. Jordan lost hope. He was distraught with despair, guilt and confusion. He continued to go to school, but he thought about dropping out. With the help and encouragement of his family, friends and teachers, he managed to stay on course and stay in school.

“It was a tough time and nothing much seemed to matter,” said Jordan. “I just started to not care anymore.”

As he entered his senior year, it seemed an impossible task to take and pass eight classes in a seven period day. It was overwhelming, still, he was determined to do well and managed to pass six of



Jordan's proud family and friends came to watch him graduate.

his classes by June, leaving the last two classes to take in summer school.

“I decided I had a plan,” said Jordan. “I decided I wanted to do something with my life. I want to adventure out, find success and make my dad proud!”

Jordan’s plan included moving to North Carolina and training in the Carpenter’s Union. It included getting an apartment with his cousin and working a second job to save some money. His future beyond that, he’s leaving to fate.

Before he left, he planned to share some advice from his lessons learned with his younger brother: “don’t mess up in school – it’s more important than you think!” ■■

“Jordan is a unique young man who always managed to maintain a kind outlook towards others, regardless of the personal turmoil he was experiencing.”

- Deb Fasce, MHS Student Services Liaison -



Graduating friends Jordan Papacharalambous, John Picarello, Jack Konefal and Josh Deitchman get ready to walk their final walk as high school students. While Jordan relocates to North Carolina, John plans to join the Ironworkers Union, Jack will work in his family’s business and Josh will continue to work at the Monticello Trading Post while he saves money for college.

Summer graduation has parents beaming with pride

The RJK Middle School cafeteria was overflowing with parents and relatives of the two dozen high school graduates who were about to receive their diplomas. All the district and school administrators who spoke to the bustling crowd expressed their congratulations to the young men and women.

“You should be extremely proud that you finished what you started,” said Monticello Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patrick Michel. “You each have a bright future to look forward to.”

For parents Kevin and Lynn Manto, the thrill of watching their son, Kevin Jr., get his high school diploma was a moment they won't soon forget - a moment they never thought they'd see.

“It was a long, tough road to get here, but he did it,” said Lynn Manto, who own Lynn's Flower Shop in Wurtsboro.

The Mantos were quick to credit the staff at Monticello High School for not giving up on their son and for getting him back on track when he strayed. ■■

“It's a shame that our society puts a negative stigma on summer school. These kids have great potential and shouldn't be made to feel embarrassed. To the contrary, they should be commended for their determination.” - Deb Fasce, MHS Student Services Liaison -



RJK Middle School social studies teacher Robert Keesler (front right) was the keynote speaker for the day's event. Keesler, who is a 1997 graduate of Monticello High School, spoke to students as a comrade and reminded them that many of the most successful people in history didn't necessarily do well in school. “Stay focused,” said Keesler, “and you will succeed.” Also pictured are Assistant Superintendents Gladys Baxter and Kathleen Pagano-Fuller, High School Principal Arlene Siegel and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patrick Michel.



Summer School Principal Greg D'Ambrosio hands Kevin Manto Jr. his diploma and shakes his hand on a job well done. Manto, who studied heavy machine operation as part of his coursework, will seek employment in that field.



Kevin and Lynn Manto sit patiently waiting for the moment their son graduates from high school. Also pictured is their daughter, Katelynn, an 8th grader at RJK Middle School.

NEW OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR BOYS

Brother 2 Brother is a new program aimed at supplying boys ages 14-19 with the skills they need to be successful, productive citizens. Through a variety of workshops and field trips, mentors empower participants to foster healthy relationships, build leadership qualities, nurture their talents and pursue academic achievement. The program is aimed at “high-risk” youths of all races who may lack a positive male role model in their personal lives, may be thinking about dropping out of school and/or are involved with gangs or drug use. It is also for boys who feel they have been left out or are misunderstood. For more information, call Mitchell Williams at 283-4417.

VIDEO STREAMING STRAIGHT TO YOU

Monticello School District is beginning to use video streaming technology to give more people firsthand access to important events. An archive of all the streamed events is linked from the district web site at www.monticelloschools.net or can be accessed directly at <http://www.totalwebcasting.com/live/mcsd/>. To date, the archive includes the district's 2008-09 Opening Day Ceremony and Monticello High School's 2008 graduation ceremony at Sullivan County Community College.

Easing Anxiety: Summer Gatherings Help Break the Ice

Chase Elementary School's Kindergarten Kick-off was successful in helping incoming kindergartners get acquainted with their classmates and teachers prior to the first day of school.

Getting to know you

Sponsored by the Chase Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and organized by PTO president Lauralyn Radlein, the day's event was filled with loads of laughter and fun. Children got to play games, participate in a sing-along, run a relay race, learn to limbo and enjoy some refreshments.

"Every year we get lots of requests from parents to host the kick-off," said Radlein. "They feel it really helps ease anxiety – theirs and their children's!"

Smoother transitions

This idea is not just used at the elementary level. RJK Middle School and Monticello High School officials have both learned that by hosting summer gatherings of their own, incoming students do better at the beginning of the school year – thus, setting the stage for continued success.

RJK's Camp Panther and MHS's Panther Camp are both designed to ease student stress by giving students a head start in navigating their new school buildings and meeting their teachers. They also get to participate in a variety of team-building activities with their classmates and hopefully in the process, make some new friends.



With the sun blazing and the leaves blowing in the breeze, for the dozens of children who gathered to meet their classmates, this was a great way to make new friends. Part of this year's focus was to help the children learn each other's names. To do this, organizers had the youngsters wear name tags and yell out their names every time it was their turn to do something. Eighth-grade honor student Caitlyn Radlein helped her mom Lauralyn plan the orientation day by sharing ideas she had learned as a student volunteer at RJK's Camp Panther.

Incoming freshmen Taylor Santos and Jessica Nesin try to navigate "The Cube," one of the team building activities at the high school's Panther Camp. During the day, students had the opportunity to mingle, talk and make new friends as part of the ice-breaking techniques designed by the event organizer, Monticello High School foreign language head teacher Donna Leyden.

Less Stress = Greater Success and More Happiness



RJK Assistant Principal Jason Doyle stopped to lend a hand as 8th grade honor student volunteer Aimee Rice helped guide 6th grader Jane Hyman through the process and rules of using a locker. School personnel were thrilled with the huge turnout and hoped the day's camaraderie would instill a little Panther Pride.



Eleventh grade student facilitators Giuliana LaPiana, Janna Carbonara and Carly Rice were followed by 9th grader Sean Reuss as they headed for one of the Panther Camp classroom events. The girls, who were part of the first Panther Camp held two years ago, volunteered because of their positive camp experience.

New director brings new focus on nu-trition



Debra Donleavy (right) has been hired as the new Director of School Nutrition. Prior to her employment in Monticello, she worked as the assistant director of dining services in the Ossining Central School District in Westchester County. Donleavy is excited to be in Monticello and plans some big changes for the upcoming year. She is working closely with the district Wellness Committee to ensure that all aspects of Monticello's cafeteria services comply with state and federal mandates on school nutrition. Donleavy will provide a stronger focus on adding new, healthy meal options for students and supplying the nutritional breakdown of school lunches. She will also work with other school personnel to help implement a compost program aimed at recycling food waste. Donleavy is married to her husband, William, has three children, William Jr., Meghan and Sean, and one grandchild Lana. Pictured left are cafeteria workers Heidi Kennedy and Elizabeth Fontanes with KLR students.

ALUMNI SPEAK: Monticello graduate significant to feminist movement

Sonia Pressman was born in Berlin, Germany, and came to the United States in 1934 with her family to escape the Holocaust. She settled in the Bronx, then Woodridge, then Monticello.

She graduated as valedictorian from Monticello High School in 1946. According to Sonia, while at Monticello, she had a number of excellent teachers, one of whom taught her Latin. Although she already spoke German, Yiddish, Flemish and English, she left the class with a lifelong love of language – that which ultimately shaped her career and influenced the direction of her life.

“I’ve been a lawyer and I am a writer and public speaker,” said Sonia. “Everything I’ve done has been built on my ability with language.”

During high school, she had no real idea what she wanted to do with her life and she did not plan on attending college. Two classmates and one of her teachers got her interested in pursuing higher education. Later that year, she won two scholarships and enrolled at Cornell University - though she still had no idea what she wanted to be.

While at Cornell, she studied languages, psychology, business and public administration and eventually graduated Phi Beta Kappa. With all her knowledge, she still found it difficult to get a job. She entered the retail industry and later worked as a secretary.

After a few years in the working world, she felt as if she was “going nowhere fast,” so she enrolled in the University of Miami School of Law. She graduated summa cum laude and went to Washington, DC, to begin work as an attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice. During her 23 years as a lawyer with the federal government, she worked as a labor law attorney with specializations in civil rights and women’s rights, was the first woman lawyer in the Office of the General Counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and was one of the founders of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She also spent 11 years as an attorney and executive with two multinational corporations. In her free time, she traveled around the world giving talks on the women’s rights revolution.

After retiring from the federal government in 1993, she began her new careers as a writer and public

speaker. When asked about her journey from the doors of Monticello High School, Sonia wanted to share some of the most important things she has learned: **“Life can be exciting and bring you your heart’s desire if you persevere. I wasn’t particularly happy with the person I was in high school. That was the person I was born and raised as - but thereafter, I created the person I have become. I don’t believe I did this consciously, but, nonetheless, I did it. You can recreate yourself as the person you want to be.”**

For more information about Sonia’s memoir, “Eat First-You Don’t Know What They’ll Give You, The Adventures of an Immigrant Family and Their Feminist Daughter,” visit www.erraticimpact.com/fuentes.



Sonia Pressman
1946



Sonia Pressman Fuentes
2008

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