

THE DRAGON

The Student
Newspaper for
Middlesex Middle
School!

Class of 2009 reflects on years at MMS

Compiled by the *Dragon* staff

The end-of-the-year edition of *The Dragon* is always a special one for our departing 8th graders. In years past, we have had a commentary from our editors and a year-in-review article grace the first page.

However, this year we wanted to give our 8th grade staffers the opportunity to reflect on their three years at MMS and tell us directly what their favorite memories are from their time here.

Sixth Grade by Caroline Weihs

"One of my memories has to be the first day of school. I was filled with butterflies and excitement. I remember walking up the third floor stairway with my friends. And all of a sudden, I forgot my homeroom number! Thoughts filled my head, and I was afraid of not making it to my class in time. Thankfully, my homeroom teacher came and got me!"

Sixth Grade by Liz Nelson

"One of my favorite memories was getting involved in the play, "Fable." It was exciting, and I learned about acting from Mrs. Maher. I also made many new friends."

Sixth Grade by Cameron Wong

"I loved the locker project at the end of the year (for LA-II). Will McCoy and I build a life-sized locker out of cardboard and filled it with school items. The point was to create a 'survival kit' for incoming sixth graders. We had to stick a metal pole in it just to keep the locker from falling apart."

Seventh Grade by Emily Molnar

"My favorite memory would probably be Greek Mythology with Ms. Scott. I was chosen to be Aphrodite, Goddess of Beauty and Love. Reciting a dramatic monologue, and getting the chance to talk and act just like the beautiful, ditzy, narcissistic goddess would, was so much fun that I won't ever forget it. I will always distinctly remember Ms. Scott pulling me after class and telling me I should take up acting. Even though it was just one English project, it sparked lots of ideas about whether I really should attempt acting."

Seventh Grade by Doug Phipps

"The thing I'll remember most has to be the Purple Team Talent Show. A few friends and I did a hilarious spoof of all the teachers. It was a ton of fun. I remember having to walk in high heels and wear a big black wig to imitate Ms. Vita (now Mrs. Pietrafesa). It was crazy fun."

Seventh Grade by Caroline Weihs

"One of the most memorable experiences I had was doing Blankets for Preemies with Mrs. DePiano and the Aqua Team. It was full of fun, and it felt great giving back."



Eighth Grade by Cameron Wong & Caroline Weihs

"We really enjoyed the Green Team Cleanup Day on Earth Day. We picked up loads of trash in the Noroton Heights area and planted flowers near the train station and the Depot. (Caroline) loved planting the flowers in a peace sign because it felt as though we made our mark in Darien. (Cameron) enjoyed trying to fix the curb near the Depot entrance with Mr. Sorensen. We had a hard time moving the stone, but it felt like we were doing something different."

Eighth Grade by Emily Molnar

"One of my favorite memories would definitely be Boston. The trip was so much fun and the great song that came out of it is something I'll never throw out. Not only did I bond more with the girls in my group, but I got to get to know and become friends with girls on my bus, who I probably wouldn't have been as close with hadn't we been on the same bus. One or two of those girls are a few of my closest friends at this point, and I'm so thankful to have been lucky enough to meet them in Boston."

This short commentary doesn't nearly get to every great moment that the Class of 2009 has experienced. However, we hope that every student in this year's class has shared in a great three years.

The *Dragon* staff would like to wish the entire Class of 2009 the best of luck in high school and beyond!

Seventh graders provide summer wishes for 2009

By Barbara Bell, Purple Team

While the focus is definitely on the 8th graders and their promotion to the high school in these final weeks, everyone has goals and things that they want to accomplish in their lifetime.

People want to travel, learn to play a certain sport, or develop a special talent. Although it's hard to believe, seventh graders are almost 2/3 of the way through Middlesex.

To recognize the students that will be graduating next year, I polled some of the Purple Team students to ask what they want to accomplish before they graduate next spring. I came up with some interesting results from over 20 people. From my research, students will have a busy summer vacation!

Top 5 Goals Seventh Graders want to accomplish:

1. Go to Boston (in eighth grade on the school trip)
2. Travel (Take a cruise, go to Europe, etc.)
3. Get better grades in school and make the honor or high honor roll
4. See your favorite sports team win (the World Series, Super Bowl, Stanley Cup, etc.)
5. Learn to become a better athlete

Good luck to seventh graders during their final year at MMS, and good luck to the eighth graders at the high school!

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Blue Laws: Did you know you can't do that?

By Amanda Percarpio, Bronze Team

The definition of a law is: any written or positive rule or collection of rules prescribed under the authority of the state or nation, as by the people in its constitution.

Everyone knows the common laws, like you can't steal or go over the speed limit, but there are some laws that a lot of people in Connecticut don't know about. These laws are Blue Laws.

Blue Laws are laws that were written a long time ago, but most police officers forget about them. Usually Blue Laws are very strange rules, and these are some of the Connecticut's Blue Laws:

Connecticut state law states...

- It's illegal to dispose of used razor blades.
- in order for a pickle to officially be considered a pickle, it must bounce.
- you can be stopped for bike riding over 65 miles per hour.
- no one may use a white cane unless they are blind.
- any dogs with tattoos must be reported to the police.

Here are some local laws...

- In Southington, silly sting is banned.
- In the city of Hartford, you aren't allowed to cross a street while walking on your hands.
- In Hartford, you may not educate dogs.
- In Hartford, balloons with advertising are illegal.
- In Hartford, you aren't allowed to cross a street while walking on your hands.
- In Hartford, it's illegal to plant a tree in the street.
- In the town of New Britain, it is illegal for fire trucks to exceed 25mph, even when going to a fire.
- In the city of Waterbury, it is illegal for any beautician to hum, whistle, or sing while working on a customer.
- In the town of Devon, it is against the law to walk backwards after sunset.
- In the town of Rocky Hill, an arcade may not have more than four amusement devices total, such as ping-pong tables, pinball machines, or shuffle-board tables.
- In the town of Guilford, only white Christmas lights are allowed.
- In Atwoodville, Connecticut people can not playing Scrabble while waiting for a politician to speak.
- In Bloomfield, it is against the law to eat in your car.
- In Simsbury, it's its illegal for a politician to campaign at the town dump.

World languages get musical touch

By Juliane Roach, Navy Team & Caroline Weihs, Green Team

On April 27th, seventh and eighth grade students taking French and Spanish were treated to a musical adventure into their language with one of two concerts.

A visit with Josée Vachon...

As a French student, I was honored for the opportunity to hear Josée Vachon perform for the seventh and eighth grade French students along with those who don't take a foreign language.

world will be able to enjoy Josée Vashon's never-forgetting performance.

A visit with Justo Lamas...

As a Spanish student, I got the opportunity to sit down and talk with Argentinean singer Justo Lamas after he performed for 7th and 8th grade Spanish students. Since Justo isn't fluent in English, we spoke only Spanish. My questions and his answers have been translated below.

Where do you live?

I'm from the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires.



(Left) Several French students join Ms. Vachon during her performance in the MMS auditorium. (Photo courtesy of the World Language Department.)

Born in Québec and raised in Maine, Josée Vachon has been sharing with students her Franco-American upbringing for over 25 years. She sings traditional and contemporary folksongs from Quebec and Acadia, and also some of her own compositions.

Some of the songs she sang were the famous *Champs Elysées*, along some of her own works such as the *Non, non, blues* and *French in America*. She also sang my personal favorite, *Frère Jacques Rock!*

After the performance, I asked Vachon a few questions. She told me that her favorite part of entertaining was when the audience becomes involved in the performance. Her message to the audience is to enjoy your culture and enjoy others! A pleasurable woman, an amazing singer, and a great Franco-American, I hope people around the

Why do you sing?

Why do I sing? I don't know. I sing because I carry the music in my heart.

What is your favorite part of singing?

My favorite part is when I am in concerts. I like interacting with the students.

What is your favorite song to sing?

I like a lot of the songs. I like "Eres tu", I like "Ya No Puedo Estar Cintin."



(Above) Justo Lamas uses his lyrics to build Spanish skills. (Photo courtesy of the World Language Department.)

Kindness Counts finishes another successful season

By Cameron Wong, Green Team

On Monday, May 25, 2009, eight dedicated Kindness Counts member spent part of their Memorial Day weekend in Saint Luke's Lifeworks cooking a delicious meal for the unfortunate.

The group comprised Annabel Schneider, Cameron Wong, Yuta Innumaru, Parker Tibbits, Joe Haddad, Doug Phipps, Reed Morgan, and Alex Hager. They all worked from 4:30 until 7:30 to make a dinner; they had to work fast under the time constraint and with few people, which made the task hard. The eight students cooked a full course meal including salad, fruit cups, chicken, gumbolaya, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy, vegetables (carrots, cauliflower, and broccoli), croissants, and ham.

Kindness Counts had around six to seven people less than usual, but that didn't matter. It was tough to manage, but with the teamwork of everyone, and the help of Mr. Smith and Dr. Marotto, the meal was still done in time, and this group was successfully able to finish off the last Kindness Counts event this school year.

After a lot of patience, and with our best smiles and greetings, everyone got to eat the delicious meal we cooked. One benefit was that with such a small group, there was a huge amount of food for everyone!

After the meal, all the Kindness Counts members sat in a group and hung out. We had laughs and a time to just talk and relax. It was an experience we couldn't forget, especially with one of the smallest groups of Kindness Counts members and a huge job to do. History can still be made by this group and this may be one of the times.

The History of Kindness Counts

Kindness Counts is a time to work for the feeling we get from helping others.

This is the mantra of the program that was founded ten years ago in 1999 as a community service program with students cooking and serving full-course dinners for senior citizens in public housing units. They cooked for Volunteers of America shelter, performed yard work for homebound seniors, and entertained seniors at rest homes.

In addition, it was found that students who were frequently suspended from school and then went to Kindness Counts had their grades turned from an "F" to "A" in one marking period. This great accomplishment caused Kindness Counts to become the subject of a *Greenwich Time* editorial.

In 2001, Kindness Counts received

the "Special Recognition Award" at Greenwich Volunteer Day. In 2002, Kindness Counts students appeared with teachers on local radio shows to discuss the program. Another milestone was reached in 2003 when this group received the "Outstanding Volunteer Youth Group Award" presented by Volunteer Center of Southwestern Fairfield County. More recently, in 2007, Kindness Counts was presented the "2007 Challenge to Educational Citizenship Award" at the Capitol in Hartford.

How To Get Involved

Attention sixth and seventh graders! This last Kindness Counts event consisted of seven eighth graders and one sixth grader. Next year, there will be very few Kindness Counts members on hard days like these. Mr. Smith needs you guys to join for next year! Make sure to see him if you are

interested. Believe me; you will get so much out of being a member of such an incredible organization!



Kindness Counts members: (Left to Right) Annabel Schneider, Alex Hager, Cameron Wong, Dough Phipps, Reed Morgan, Joe Haddad, Parker Tibbits, and Yuta Innumaru. (Photo courtesy of Kindness Counts)

Rowing sensation, national figure visits MMS

Ridley shares experience, cause with students

By Liz Nelson & Sloane Palmer,
Tan Team

Paul Ridley, a 25-year old ocean rower, visited MMS only a few weeks ago to talk about his cause. He recently organized a unique fundraiser for cancer research called "Row for Hope."

He succeeded in rowing solo across the Atlantic Ocean from La Gomera in the Canary Islands to Antigua in the Caribbean. He left on January 1 this year and just returned on March 29, making the journey 88 days at sea without any support.

The extent of his human contact during the trip was a few cargo ships that almost collided with his ocean rowboat. Other than that, he managed to listen to the same songs on his i-pod repetitively and make friends with marine life. Talk about isolation!

The purpose of "Row for Hope" is to raise money for cancer research. Ridley's inspiration comes from his mother, Kathie Ridley. She passed away from cancer eight years ago on February 5, 2001 when he was 17 years old. The available treatments weren't very effective and she lost the battle after only four months.

In his daily blog, Ridley wrote, "The impact my mom's death had on me was profound, and is single-handedly responsible for where I am at this very moment..."

Ridley made the most of this tragic event and created "Row for Hope." This is a perfect example of life throwing you lemons and making lemonade.

The hardest thing for Ridley at the beginning of the row was a struggle with doubt. He knew that there was going to be a point of the journey where he would want to turn back, instead he used support from his friends and family who convinced him it was worth it.

Once Ridley was committed, he fo-

cused on breaking up his journey so it didn't seem so overwhelming.

"I do this by setting dozens of goals during every shift, each with its own reward of some kind," Ridley explained.

Paul Ridley hopes that his organization will encourage more people to donate to cancer research.

"Through this row I'm hoping to make a statement in as bold a way as I know how -- that cancer research matters and the pace of life-saving progress must be accelerated with additional funding."

In 2007, 8,000 people died of Malignant Melanoma cancer, which is the most serious type of skin cancer. Are you going to donate?

Please check out Mr. Ridley's blog to learn more about marine life, daily diet, and much more at RowForHope.com!



What really happens at 'Promotion'

By Anjali Krishnamachar, Tan Team

Is it a ritual dance of farewell? Is it a truckload of sobbing parents and celebrating students? As we near the end of the year, eighth graders all around the school are furiously debating this very question: What exactly *is* promotion?

Although the process itself is not exactly a secret, it has always been a topic of mystery in the hallways at MMS.

"When I was a sixth and seventh grader, I always wondered just what happened on that special day for the eighth graders," says eighth grader Kat McKay. "The school always seemed so secretive as we non-eighth graders were engrossed in our own, smaller graduations. But what do the eighth graders do?"

And to be more precise, where do they do it? And when? And how? Well you get the picture – the actual promotion ceremony has somehow remained a mystery to most MMS-goers. But this year, the mystery at last will be solved!

Mr. Beinstein, our assistant principal, revealed some of the inner workings of this year's promotion.

To begin, the actual ceremony will take place in the gym on the last day of school, June 19, 2009. Several reliable sources have claimed that it can get extremely hot in that small space. The limitation on space is also the reason that students are only allowed to invite two guests.

Even with that restriction, there will be about 1,000 people in the gym – a bunch of

hot, sweaty, annoyed individuals, as I'm sure you can imagine. Therefore, in an attempt to keep the process short, the ceremony will only extend from about 9:30am to 11:00am.

So... what actually happens? According to Mr. Beinstein, the eighth graders will "march" into the gym, while a band plays. This will feature specifically selected students from the Eighth Grade Wind Ensemble. Students will then take their seats, organized alphabetically. With Mr. Beinstein as the M.C. (Master of Ceremonies), students will enjoy several presentations, including the Camerata singers, student-made videos, and two special awards.

This year, eighth graders, who took computers in the third and fourth quarters, created iMovies under the guidance Ms. Behrman. Put together almost entirely from students' individual and independent filming, these pieces reflect life at Middlesex in a creative way.

Finally, set to the music of suitable songs, these videos are both moving and reminiscent. To choose the best videos to air at promotion, Ms. Behrman will select the top 15 and show them to a committee composed of Mr. Beinstein and the grade eight team leaders. They, in turn, will select 4 videos to present at promotion and 4 for the day before. There is a lot of suspense and excitement regarding these videos.

"I really hope that my video is chosen!" says eighth grader Caroline Ashcraft. "We worked hard on it, and I think most

would agree that it turned out quite well." This will undoubtedly put a good amount of pressure on the judges to choose wisely!

When it comes to awards, only two will be presented at the actual Promotion assembly. These include the Superintendent's Award and the Secretary of State Award. The criteria for the Superintendent's Award is geared more towards a student who is a good citizen (responsible and respectful) whereas The Secretary of State Award is an all-around award that focuses in more on leadership and community service.

Although there are other awards, they will be given out at a separate ceremony on the second-to-last day of school. This meeting will be much more kid-oriented, with only students present, with the exception of the parents whose students are receiving awards. And eighth graders: here's something to look forward to: in the past, students have run the ceremony and acted as M.C.s! So, potential speakers, prepare yourselves!

Finally comes the actual part of the ceremony in which the students are promoted. Each student will be called up to the podium individually to shake hands with Dr. Bocciafuso and receive their diploma.

"Remember, diploma in left, shake with right," Mr. Beinstein advises all graduating students. Then, after all the drama has subsided, the soon-to-be high schoolers will troop down to the cafeteria to eat "finger food" and generally relax a bit. Rumor has it that there will even be several gigantic cakes congratulating the Class of '09. But shhh! It's our little secret...

Jane provides her final two cents of the year

Dear Jane,

I've been dying to figure out who you are! Everyone knows that there is someone on the staff of the Dragon who answers the Help column every issue. But who? It's driving me crazy!

- Just Wondering About Jane

Dear JWAJ,

It seems that every year there is someone who asks this, and every year there is the same answer: no one can say. Only a select few students actually know my true identity, and they have been sworn to secrecy. I suggest letting this quest fizzle out, considering there is no way you will find out.

Dear Jane,

When my mom was younger, she starred on a soap opera that aired in Alaska and Wisconsin on public access channels. I'm happy that my mom was able to succeed in show business, but the fame has gotten to her head. She forces my brother and me to be her "entourage" and follow her around with

make-up and hairspray. It's embarrassing and sort of strange, but I don't have the heart to tear my mother's dream apart. Help!

- Stuck With a Star

Dear SWS,

Congratulations to your mom for all her accomplishments! It's a big deal to be on a soap opera- usually, the producers cast the most dramatic and over-the-top talent. I can see, then, that if your mom starred on a soap opera, that she would be a little self centered and more than a little oblivious to how you feel. I suggest writing her a formal business letter explaining your withdrawal from the job. That way, it eliminates the awkward component of quitting, but it also allows you to emphasize why you feel the way you do. At the very least, you'll be able to convince your mom that this practice is better in private. Good luck, and may the force of public access channels be with you!

Dear Jane,

I'm graduating this year, and the thought of leaving MMS is heartbreaking. I know I'm going to miss everything - the teachers, the building, the inside jokes and memories that were all created here. It's been a great three years, and I'm afraid that high school won't compare. Is there anything I can do to not be so sad? Middlesex was everything. Soon, it will be just another part of my past.

- Miserable Without MMS

Dear MWM,

Aww! I think the majority of the graduating class has felt some level of sadness anticipating Promotion. There's not a lot that anyone can do. I recommend not dwelling on your years here and instead pondering the pros of the high school. There are so many opportunities in your future: more classes, more teachers, more students to meet. High school will end up being the time of your life. Have fun and good luck!

XO,
Jane

Darien to Darién Update

By Señor Smith,
Contributing Faculty Writer

The big renovation project at Nicanor School, MMS' sponsored learning community in the remote rainforest of Darién, Panamá, is now 75% complete.

Our students worked creatively and diligently to raise funds for the construction of the little school's first library/computer lab, now finished, and for the installation of a poultry-raising facility and a kitchen inside the school. In addition, the proceeds from our two variety shows have funded classroom renovations.

According to Project Director Juventina de Hernández of *La Fundación Pro-Niños de Darién*, the little Nicanor facility is "the only school in the whole Province of Darién

with tiles in all its classrooms." She further comments that the principal, teachers, and children are thrilled to have such a beautiful school now.

The Panamanian government has a program called *Conéctate al Conocimiento*, meaning "Get Connected to Knowledge," its purpose being to provide Internet connection and service to disadvantaged, rural schools. Because of the Middlesex program, *Darien a Darién*, the Panamanian government is in the process of providing this service to the remote, virtually inaccessible Nicanor School. We look forward to the day when students at MMS may electronically exchange and share ideas, opinions, viewpoints, and learning with our new friends on the other side of our virtual bridge.



(Above) One of the brand new classrooms at the Nicanor school. (Courtesy of Nicanor school)

Green Team cleans on Earth Day

By Doug Phipps, Green Team

On April 22, 2009, the Green Team went to Noroton Heights to help clean up and plant flowers, all in honor of Earth Day. As many of you know, Noroton Heights is *not* one of the cleanest places in Darien.

It had a ton of trash. One student and one teacher even spent half an hour under a bush, picking out all sorts of garbage. There were numerous notable and large items as well, like large iron blocks and, even more unusually, a sink.

The Green Team spent hours picking up everything from cigarette butts to giant signs made of cardboard to sinks. The team was split up into five groups. Each one had to cleanup a different locations including, the train station parking lot, the area around Stop 'n Shop, and the parking lots behind several shops on the strip.

By the end of the morning, Noroton Heights was sparkling. Andrew McPhee was especially recognized for his brave efforts, and won a coveted green water bottle.

Later in the day, the Green Team went back to Noroton Heights to plant several different types of flowers in areas that desperately needed them. These included by The Depot and near the train station.

While working on this part of the project, the team even had a little fun, making numerous drivers (including a 70-year-old man) honk their car and/or truck horns.

One student explains, "It was a really great experience, and now I can't help looking at the now clean Noroton Heights every time I pass by!"

Another student says, "It was fun! I didn't think I would, but I had a great time!"

I witnessed the event myself. The first portion of the day included cleaning up all around Noroton Heights.

In the end, Noroton Heights is now a lot cleaner and better looking than it was in

Dragon staff member wins national honor

Dragon staff member Anjali Krishnamachar was recently named a runner-up in the 2009 Aspiring Young Journalist contest. This contest is sponsored by the Journalism Education Association, or JEA.

Each year, the JEA selects only three recipients for this award. Applicants must be in 8th grade, plan on continuing their study of journalism in high school, and submit a portfolio of their journalistic work.

During her two years with the Dragon, Anjali has covered everything from the annual Student Council elections to world issues that appeal to the typical MMS student. Anjali sees herself as an international

journalist, combining her love of language with her desire to travel. She feels it would be the perfect career choice, giving her a way to see the world and at the same time report news and develop her writing skills.

Mrs. Boulier, co-adviser of *The Dragon* said, "In terms of Anjali's writing capabilities, you will find that she has a very distinctive voice, something not often achieved by such a young writer."

Mr. Sorensen adds, "Anjali is the type of student that all middle schoolers should aspire to be. The greatest thing about Anjali is that she is an equally amazing young woman as she is a talented writer."



(Above) Anjali Krishnamachar shows off her certificate of achievement. (Photo courtesy of The Dragon)

WRITER'S SPOTLIGHT*A section dedicated to creative writing from MMS students!***INTO THE DEEP****By Craig Maguire,
Bronze Team**

Deeper and deeper I go,
The creatures shimmering
Like thousands of scales
On a mighty serpent,
As if welcoming me.

I turn over;
Looking up
I see the rays of light
Coming down,
Brightening my surroundings,
As I travel onwards.

Sculptures rise up
Towering above.
I see no bottom to them.
This is truly another world
Of unimaginable beauty.

This land so alien,
So different
And yet so perfect,
Is impossible to describe.
As I look down,
I see a sight so incredible,
A poet could only dream of it.

It is a great abyss
Empty
And yet so full of wonder.
It truly makes me believe
I am the smallest thing in the
world.

Past the abyss lie plants
Like frozen fireworks,
With lights dancing everywhere,
Revealing
Secrets of the deep.

As suddenly as it starts,
It has to end
But I will return to this alien
world
For things hide in the deep
Waiting to be found!

**Spring****By Corinne Taney,
Bronze Team**

A warm air
rustles through
the leaves
of an awakening
oak tree
sounding like
a light drop
of rain
in a puddle.
The buzz of
a bee
gathering pollen
from a flower
sounding like
static from
a fuzzy signal
of a
radio.

Children's laughter
as they pump their
feet on a swing
is a quiet jingle
of a dog's collar.

These are the sounds of spring.

The faculty advisors for THE DRAGON would like to thank this year's staff for a fantastic school year.

They include the following students:

Grade 8: Sarah Colon, Chloe DeChellis, Anjali Krishnamachar, Katherine McKay, Emily Molnar, Liz Nelson, Jen O'Neill, Sloane Palmer, Doug Phipps, Juliane Roach, Annabel Schneider, Caroline Weihs, & Cameron Wong

Grade 7: Barbara Bell & Cameron Van Der Graaf

Grade 6: Amanda Percarpio

NOTE: If you are interested in joining our staff next year, make sure to listen up for announcements about our first meeting when we return to school in September. Have a great summer!