

UPCOMING EVENTS

Today and Tomorrow
Scholastic Book Fair
Before school, recess and
after school until 4 P.M.,
Library

May 12
Last PTA Meeting
7 P.M., Library

May 17
*Open House and Pasta
Feed Dinner*
Dinner, 5:30 — 7:00 P.M.,
Multi
Open House, 7 — 8:00 P.M.

May 20
Music Concert
7:00 P.M., Multi
(Dress rehearsal 1:50 P.M.)

May 23 — May 27
*Last week of school, early
dismissal*
1:30 and 1:50 P.M.

May 24
Upper Grade Field Day

May 25
6th Grade Promotion
6:00 P.M., Bleachers

May 26
Primary Field Day

Friday, May 27
*Crazy Day and last day of
school*
Early release, 12:30 P.M.



Friends of Penngrove PTA PANTHER PRESS

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This year the PTA takes a moment to honor four special Penngrove supporters. Two have earned the Honorary Service Award and two will receive the esteemed Golden Oak Award at 6th grade promotion. The Golden Oak is given to individuals who have made significant contributions to the welfare of children. Traditionally, at Penngrove, it has been awarded to notable parents when their last children leaves the school. And, the Honorary Service Award recognizes individuals who have given outstanding service to children and youth. Many of the programs we take for granted at Penngrove, such as *Recess Renaissance*, *Mathbusters*, the Drama Club, and the Scholastic Book Fair were created by or helped along by our honorees.

The PTA is pleased to honor Leslie Keating, Resource Specialist, and Kelly Sessi, Penngrove parent with Golden Oak Awards; and, Dana Porter, volunteer math teacher, and Lorena Gies, Penngrove secretary, with Honorary Service Awards.

LESLIE KEATING: Resource Specialist or perpetual motion machine?

Anyone who's spent an hour with Les-

lie Keating will confirm that she is a shining example of Newton's first law of motion: a body in motion tends to stay in motion. While the PTA is tempted to award her the Golden Oak merely for confirming this fact of physics, it is, instead, the end result of her creative energy that captures our admiration.

Ms. Keating is a member of the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) team at Penngrove School. Since arriving at Penngrove in 2004, she has been the hub of our RSP program, spending each day championing the causes of her RSP students by coordinating with teaching staff, parents, and other students. RSP programs at other schools might be a place where kids with learning challenges go for help with their homework. Not so, at Penngrove. RSP kids receive standards-based teaching in language arts and math when they leave the classroom for "resource". Ms. Keating has assembled a team of specialists who assist RSP students in the classroom, or assist groups of RSP students out of the classroom. They collaborate with teachers to optimize a

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program for each individual. “She cares about each individual child,” notes Stacy Bettencourt, instructional assistant. “She fights for each kid.” *Orchestrates* might be a better way to describe what Ms. Keating does. For example, since she’s been at Penngrove, she’s coordinated with teachers and staff to hold language arts and math at specific times in the Penngrove school day. This allows the specialists to work with whole groups of children in reading and writing intervention. “Each year is different and there’s some adjustment, but we have very cooperative teachers,” says Ms. Keating.

A typical day in RSP starts at 8:30 with a staff of two RSP instructors, two assistants and two one-on-one aides. K-3 students receive intervention with reading and writing in the RSP classrooms, while the 4-6th graders get their assistance in groups or in their own classrooms after morning snack/recess. Then the RSP staff and numerous parent and teacher volunteers assist in *Recess Renaissance* after lunch. This award-winning enrichment program is unique to Penngrove and the brainchild of Leslie Keating and Stacy Bettencourt.

ORGANIZED CHAOS

The art and beauty of *Recess Renaissance* is how Ms. Keating has recruited so many people to be a voluntary part of this program. “Never underestimate the value of turning a jump rope” she quips. She encourages *Renaissance* volunteers to come whenever they can and do the thing they want to do at recess. “What I love about Penngrove is the jumping in of the parents. We love adults to play and get a little bit goofy. There are dads that lead soccer games at lunch. Annie Lasley has



Morning Jam. Leslie Keating gets her groove on while helping Katie Kelly (below) teach all the Penngrove students dance steps to the Black-eyed Peas song, *I’ve Got a Feeling*. Katie originally choreographed the dance to teach at *Recess Renaissance*, but the idea grew in popularity. Now, students are dancing before school. The activity and camaraderie help kids get the blood flowing and settle down before class. Katie and Leslie hope to get the dance on the local news to show everyone in Petaluma how Penngrove rolls.



a creation station where kids make art. Samantha Bolinger has been running a knitting club since we began. Volunteers can quietly share their experience. Everyone brings their own flavor; all they need is a desire to nurture.” And, through *Recess Renaissance*, Ms. Keating gives those volunteers just enough structure to nurture any student who might need it. “You don’t need to know everyone’s name, just come and make a connection,” she encourages.

BLOOD, SWEAT & TEARS

Part of what makes Ms. Keating so effective at her RSP job is that very connection she makes with students and parents alike. When working with RSP kids, she notes there is no *miracle* solution. Each student has a personalized and ever-changing program. As such, Ms. Keating considers everyone a

part of that child’s team: the parents, extended family, teachers, and friends on campus. She knows everyone’s story and they trust her with it. “It takes a lot of blood, sweat and tears sometimes, but I love it when kids ‘get it’;” meaning, when a child who *can’t* and *won’t* turns into a child who *can* and *does*. “I love sitting with sixth graders who had such difficulty learning to sound out words in first grade, and hearing them say they love writing.”

When discussing her achievements, Ms. Keating is quick to point out the other individuals involved in each one. Her goal, it seems, is to empower others to add their own voice to the mix. Ever humble, when asked what she’s proudest of, Ms. Keating doesn’t hesitate when she says, “My two children, Caitlin and Connor.” In that way, she is exactly like every other proud parent

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here at Penngrove.

KELLY SESSI: Head of a dynasty.

After 20 years, Kelly Sessi knows more about Penngrove School than anyone else, “except for Margaret Cunha”, she jokes. In 1991, her daughter, Nicole, began first grade at Penngrove. “Nicole would never leave me,” she remembers, “I got to know Margaret very well,” because Nicole would be keeping her company in the office while Margaret called Kelly. Since that time, all four of Martin and Kelly’s kids have attended Penngrove: Nicole, 26, Kaitlin, 24, Kyler, 15 and Isabella, 11. At promotion on May 25th, after two decades and 3 principals, it will be the end of a Sessi era.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

In honoring Kelly Sessi with the Golden Oak award, the PTA must also acknowledge the entire Sessi family. They all are well-known for their behind-the-scenes presence at the school — from financial support for equipment and necessities, to baked goods and creative costuming. It all began with pollywogs (or was it baby birds?) in Ms. Adams class when Nicole was in first grade. Kelly and Martin would bring in creatures for the class to observe and watch grow.

“I’ve never been one to take the lead,” she claims. However, she’s been behind almost every kind of event that exists in your average classroom. Starting out by going into the classroom to help, Kelly remembers taking Kaitlin into Nicole’s classrooms. “It took me a few years to work up to the Room Parent role,” she admits. “I remember that Kaitlin was in Ms. Cheal’s class for two years — I got to do a lot of art projects, that was fun!” Both Kyler and Isabella have been involved with the drama club. When Kyler was in 6th grade, Kelly helped create the puppet-star in the school’s production of “Little Shop of Horrors” The gigantic human-eating venus flytrap was a collaborative effort with husband, Martin.



Mother of 4. “I have always felt so welcomed [at Penngrove]. It’s a great community. It’s like a family — it has that wonderful family feel.”

— Kelly Sessi

As her kids got older, her involvement became more about driving for and going on Field Trips — especially to Fort Ross and Angel Island. “I think Martin went on Kyler’s Angel Island trip,” she recalls.

When Kelly hasn’t been available, daughter, Nicole, has been able to drive on trips in her stead — and make the occasional fabulous batch of cupcakes. One of the pleasures of this past year for Kelly has been getting back on Penngrove’s campus and doing the kinds of things she’s always done; now for her youngest, Isabella.

Over the years as a Penngrove parent, Kelly has watched other parents worry about transitions from year-to-year; what teachers their kids will get, etc. “I think the teachers here are so great, we’ve always had amazing teachers” she relates, “I love the 45/15. It’s wonderful for the kids to have that. They come out so well-rounded and transition easily into junior high.” Her advice to any new Penngrove parents, “Even if you can only do it once a month, go into the classroom. Bring your younger child, if possible. The teachers are very welcoming. Many hands make light work.” This is what Kelly has done herself over the years: given what she can, when she can. And, what a cumulative difference her contributions have made.

When looking back, Kelly notes, “I have always felt so welcomed [at Penngrove]. It’s a great community. It’s like a family — it has that wonderful family feel.”

LORENA GIES: Book Fair Maven.

While we all know Lorena Gies as the school secretary, the PTA recognizes her for continuous support of the Scholastic Book fair for the past 10 years — since her son, Alex, was in 2nd Grade. And, we honor her support of the Drama Club, an organization she was involved with while her daughter, Samantha, attended Penngrove. When Alex was in 5th Grade, Lorena took a position in the Penngrove School office which she has held for the last 7 1/2 years. Still, she continued to volunteer for both the Drama Club and Book Fair. Today, she is such a fixture as the “book fair lady” that many of us think it is part of her office job. *It isn’t!*

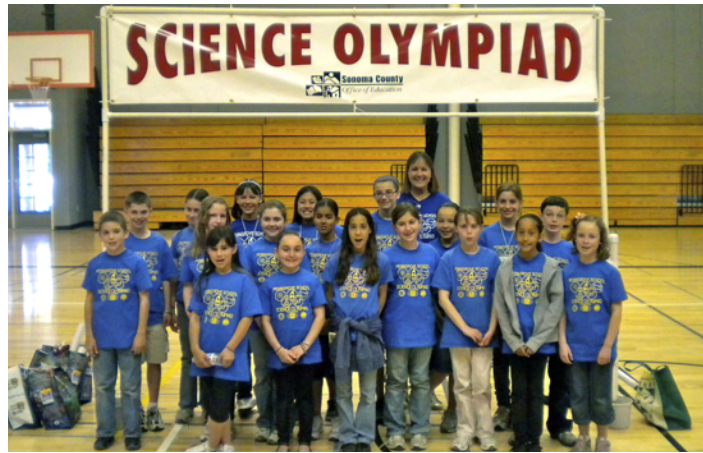
Two years after her last child left Penngrove, she con-

BRIEFS

Science Olympians

Panthers nab 4th place

The Penngrove Science Olympiad team recently competed against 17 teams from 13 schools all over Sonoma County to gain a 4th place showing in their knowledge of all things scientific. After performing feats of engineering, aerodynamics, physics and science knowledge, students received one 4th place, two 3rds, two 2nds and a 1st place in “Categories”. Go, Olympian Panthers!



Olympians. L-R, back row: Hayden Dennis, Kail Gibson, Claire Mar, Emiri Nomura, Sarah Beck, Ms. Maloney. L-R, center row: Dylan Easley, Sarah Graham, Lindy Tweten, Mayar Dahmani, Elizabeth Mar, Morgan Hartman, Matthew Kalemba. L-R, front row: Siana Jimenez, Delaney Stevenson, Alayza Cervantes-Munoz, Gianna Braga, Christina Gibson, Marilyn Cervantes-Munoz, Sydney Dennis.

Penngrove Idol DVD

Experts needed!

A kind volunteer recorded our *Penngrove Idol* performance on 4 mini-disks. The *Idol* techies need

someone with the skill or software to convert them to regular DVD format. Once they have a master DVD, the *Idol* team can take it from there. (If they can't

convert them, then they'll refund your money — but, let's hope they won't have to!). If you can help, please contact Samantha Bolinger at 623-3041. ■

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tinues to go on and beyond the call of duty as a tremendous Penngrove supporter.

DANA PORTER: Chief Mathbuster.

Dana volunteers as director and organizer of Penngrove's *Mathbusters* program. To call what she does "volunteering" is a tremendous understatement. For the past 7 years, Dana has spent four mornings a week at Penngrove teaching kids with accelerated math aptitude. Her involvement began when her daughter, Beth, was in 4th Grade. Dana worked with Ms. Maloney, then a 4th grade teacher, to develop an advanced math curriculum for her daughter. Other parents became interested in what Beth was doing. From this beginning, the *Mathbusters* program grew. In concert with Ms. Maloney, Dana developed an approach that is built on problem solving. She wants her kids to not only know how to get to the right answer, but why the answer is correct. And, her students are her biggest fans.

Initially funded by a GATE grant, the *Mathbusters* program currently continues with no special funding — except by Dana and the parents of *Mathbusters* students. Even after her son, Alex, left Penngrove 3 years ago, Dana continues with *Mathbusters*. You might see Dana pushing her math cart around the Penngrove campus — this is because she often doesn't have any fixed location. She has worked everywhere at Penngrove from the Library to



Outstanding Volunteers. Lorena Gies, left, and Dana Porter, right, received recognition at this year's Volunteer Tea, sponsored by Penngrove School staff.

the YES room, to empty classrooms — sometimes all in one week. Yet, Dana arrives 4 mornings a week during every week of the school year to educate and challenge the *Mathbusters*. Dana's dedication is truly inspirational, and that's why the PTA honors her.

Any time you work in the classroom, assist a teacher, buy classroom supplies, or keep an appointment to help a child learn something, you emulate Ms. Keating, Kelly Sessi, Lorena Gies and Dana Porter. Every Penngrove school adult has something special to offer. What is so unique and amazing about our school community, is that you choose to offer it. ■