The Beacon

News to family and friends of Ann Arbor Christian School

2008-2009, Number 3

In partnership with Christian families, Ann Arbor Christian School offers Christ-centered, academically excellent education that challenges students to live and act in society as committed followers of Jesus Christ

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June 2009

Reflecting & reaching ahead…

Dear friends of AACS,

The 2008-2009 school year at Ann Arbor Christian School has drawn to a close and 2009-2010 is on the horizon. I'd like to take a look back and a look forward with you.

BACK

- Our chapel theme for the year – The Names of God – set the stage for some really great worship experiences for our students and parents this year.
- We welcomed 21 new students to our class rosters and eight new families to our school community.
- Our February and March Open Houses were very successful, with 21 families attending and seven of them eventually joining our school.
- AACS used an electronic billboard on US-23 for the first time.
- Our new auction raised $14,000 out of $114,741 given to AACS this fiscal year, far above our annual goal.
- A new scholarship – The Marie Mountain Clark Scholarship – was established.
- $20 to $50 for L. I. F. E. (Long-term Investment For Everyone) was launched, bringing on-line giving to AACS.

FORWARD

- Our chapel theme for next year will be either Psalm 23 or Becoming Fruit-Bearing Trees.
- Next year, we hope to introduce several new families and students to AACS. Currently, our new families stand at 14 with 25 new students planning to attend in the fall.
- Next year, our public relations goals include further promotion of AACS in the surrounding communities and a greater presence on the web.
- In our second auction, we hope to expand the circle of those who contribute and bid while raising even more needed funds for the school.
- $20 to $50 for L. I. F. E. will be promoted on our website and in our school publications, thereby encouraging others to regularly invest financially in Christian education at AACS.

I pray you have a blessed summer as you take time to re-connect with family, God, and His creation.

Blessings In Christ,
Thom Ritzema, principal

Photo by Sue Crittenden

Special bonds are formed each year when AACS kindergarten and fifth-grade students pair up for the Reading Buddy program. Kindergartners Jaydin and Dre enjoy some special attention from fifth-grade friends, Maranda and Megan.

Photo by Darren De Zeeuw

The eighth-grade class, assisted by middle-school teacher Sue De Zeeuw, held a car wash and donated all proceeds--over $500--to Food Gatherers. Collin helped flag down all those dirty cars!

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School 'SOLD!' on biggest fundraiser yet

By Suzanne Vivacqua, AACS parent

The first Ann Arbor Christian School auction was a booming success, raising more than $14,000 – the largest amount ever at a single AACS fundraiser!

Food, friendship, and fun highlighted March 13, when 127 people gathered at Travis Pointe Country Club in Saline for the auction, dubbed "In the Beginning." School families and alumni invited friends and relatives for an evening of socializing and the opportunity to purchase fabulous gifts and services to benefit the school.

School volunteers solicited donations from local businesses, and school families were encouraged to host parties or offer unique talents for auction. Everything from dirt bikes, fishing trips and massages, to homemade pies, campers, and lake homes were on the auction block for enthusiastic bidders.

Projects crafted by each classroom at AACS proved to be popular, from the third-grade photo album to the eighth-grade chess set and the first-grade angel thumbprint platter.

In addition to the live auction, many items were part of a silent auction. Beloved AACS teachers offered students opportunities to spend special time with them, including game nights, a trip to Jungle Java, and a chance to play and make pancakes. Various art pieces and gift baskets also were sold. Attendees mingled through the silent auction while enjoying warm, tasty appetizers served by the Travis Pointe staff.

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

AACS parents Shannon Waroway and Suzanne Vivacqua admire class-created items up for auction.

The bidding was energized and entertaining. "It's exciting to see who gets carried away in a live auction," said auction chairperson Laura Bowen.

This to-be-annual event promises even more funds raised and another fantastic evening of socializing next year. Plans include looking for a larger venue due to the high number of attendees. Be sure to mark your calendars – you do not want to miss it!

Principal for a day

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

At the Ann Arbor Christian School auction, parents waged bidding wars, scrambling for the chance for their child to be "Principal for a day." Fourth-grader Sam Vivacqua thought it sounded intriguing, so his parents Ray and Suzanne came ready to outbid other hopefuls – and they did.

On May 18, Sam took his day in the principal's shoes very seriously. He learned that longer recesses and a day with no homework weren't the best ideas after talking to Thom Ritzema (the real principal) about decisions that promote learning in school.

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

"Principal" Sam examines the large pile of work on "his" desk.

Here's what Sam had to say about his big day:

Q: What were some of your responsibilities as principal?

A: I had to carry the master keys in my pocket all day to be sure I did not get locked out of my office. I had to supervise the kids in the gathering space and at recess. I had to use my time wisely to get my jobs done.

Q: What did you enjoy the most?

A: Being able to have my own office, and doing the principal's work instead of school work.

Q: What was the most difficult part about being principal?

A: The hardest part was juggling all the things I had to do. It did get a little easier as the day went on.

Q: What changes did you make? Were there some changes you wanted to make but couldn't?

A: I let kids fly paper airplanes at school during recess, and made cookies for every person in the school. I wanted to make lunch recess a little longer, but I couldn't. I also wanted the whole school to have no homework on that day, but I couldn't do that either.

Q: Do you think you would ever want to be a principal after this experience?

A: It was very fun, but I have other dreams for when I grow up.

Q: How much did your parents bid to win this day?

A: $300 (and according to mom, it was worth every penny!)

Farewell, 8th graders!

It is time to say good-bye to another group of incredible eighth graders. We applaud these 23 remarkable kids for demonstrating independence and maturity in their academic studies, leadership, and service to others.

As they make the move to high school, we challenge them to live boldly as witnesses of God's truth, holding fast to their class Bible verse:

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline."
- 2 Timothy 1:7

We the eighth grade leaders and the class of 2009 will **demonstrate** our faith and make changes in our community. We will stand up for the excluded, stand up to the excluders, and stand out as unique individuals and followers of Christ. We will **support** and encourage others in difficult times, respect them unconditionally, and express our emotions in an appropriate way. New ideas will be accepted with **enthusiasm**; we will be open minded and willing to take risks. We will **dare** to stretch our imaginations by being confident in who we are in academics, relationships, and worship. In all we do we will be **willing** to follow God's plan for us; keeping a good attitude even in discouraging situations. Sometimes we may get distracted, but we will set good examples for those around us. In the end, we are just beginning our **journey** into the world where it's easy to get sidetracked and lost; in all things we will rely on God.

Photo by Steve Kasten

8th grade graduates (starting in top row, left to right): Michael, Matt, Caitlin, Josh, Taylor, Eric, Ryan, Andie, Hannah, Matt, Nick, Barrett, Drew, Collin, Garrett, Justus, Erik, Jacob, Natalie, Madi, Emily, Gabrielle, and Brandt.

Broken Record Grille sizzles

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

The eighth grade surpassed its goal with this year's Broken Record Grille while offering the school an uproarious 1950s-style night out.

The annual sock-hop dinner – the grand-finale fundraiser for the class of 2009's trip to Chicago – brought in $723.56. That's a lot of $1.50 hotdogs and $2 root-beer floats!

The event ended a year full of various fundraisers to help pay for their expedition to the Windy City. Several babysitting dates, a garage sale, and many school pizza lunches wound up earning about $320 per student, exceeding the original goal of $275 each. (The class of 23 raised about $8,630, some of which goes to the chaperones' trip costs.)

Each year, eighth-grade families brainstorm about funding the four-day Chicago journey. New this year was the sale of school prayer calendars, featuring color photos of AACS kids, events, and artwork. It pulled in the year's largest amount: $1,152.50! Fundraisers borrowed from the past included selling cookie dough, collecting refundable pop bottles, and hosting the Soup Supper on Science Fair night.

The Broken Record Grille has become a tried-and-true event, with new twists each year. While the hoola-hoop and bubble-gum-blowing contests date back to the original 2005 gala, healthy garden salads were added to the menu this year. Dancing and dining to classics like "Rock Around the Clock" always set the mood.

"We go to a '50s-style diner called Ed Debevic's while in Chicago, so there's a connection there," middle-school teacher Janet Jansen explained.

While our eighth-grade servers do wear poodle skirts and greased back hair, Ed Debevic's staff is more edgy, silly and rude, according to Mrs. Jansen. For fun, this year our AACS waiters and waitresses did come up with 1950s-style names to wear on their chests like "Potsy" and "Flo."

"Mark your calendar for next year," Mrs. Jansen said. "It's a great year-end event for the school community."

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Middle-school teacher Mandy Boelter gets into the spirit of the hula-hoop contest at the Broken Record Grille.

8th-grade awards presented

Eighth-grader Taylor Boes is this year's recipient of the Harriet Dekker Memorial Scholarship. The selection committee awards the $1,500 college scholarship to an eighth grader who shows character and academic promise.

Eighth-grader Brandt Hofman received the John Philip Sousa award. Brandt was recognized for his musical excellence and leadership during his three years in the AACS band program.

From back page:
At the Broken Record Grille, sixth-grader David won the prize for biggest bubble as classmates Michael and Joel cheered him on.

6th & 7th graders learn anatomy at U of M

By Kathy Ann Moilanen, Beacon copy editor

Our middle schoolers got a feel for college anatomy by touching and examining "plasticized" human lungs, hearts and livers this spring.

The University of Michigan opened its plastination lab to Ann Arbor Christian School's attentive sixth and seventh graders. It's an honor for such a young and fairly large group to be allowed in a university lab of this sort.

"As our group size has grown, our track record has helped maintain the department's welcome," said middle-school teacher Mark Wiersma, noting this is at least AACS' fourth trip to the lab. "Our kids respond well and handle themselves well. The organ donations from individuals and families are treated with dignity and discretion and our kids do that as well."

"Plastination" preserves real human body parts so they can be handled indefinitely in laboratories and classrooms without preservatives or refrigeration. The plasticized organs and other body parts are an advancement over the often messy and strong-smelling specimens in jars of liquid formaldehyde.

U of M is one of the few places involved in the growing practice of plastination. Other university labs nationwide send formaldehyde-preserved specimens to U of M, where they are plasticized and then returned to the sending institutions.

The multi-step plastination process involves replacing body fluids and soluable fat with plastics, like latex or silicon, in a vacuum chamber. The resulting specimen is a delicately detailed, rubbery version of the original; it's dry and can be easily handled and studied.

One person who donated their body to U of M had undergone surgery to replace a faulty heart valve with a pig's heart valve. AACS students could see the metal clamp holding the pig's valve in place inside the dissected human heart. Middle schoolers also examined healthy human lungs alongside diseased lungs, and a healthy liver versus a failing liver.

The field trip rounded out the "introduction to anatomy" unit taught during AACS' Life Science curriculum. It brought home lessons on re-starting the lungs and heart in emergency situations, taught when AACS students earned American Red Cross certification in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation earlier this year.

The visit to U of M also prompted classroom discussions on bio-ethical issues, such as why cameras were not allowed in the plastination lab. The AACS community treasures the generous support of the U of M in teaching our students.

Wide-eyed learning

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

AACS parent Sherry Day Kao wears her optometrist hat as she shows a sheep eye to third-graders Josh and Julia.

Third graders watched enthralled as Ann Arbor Christian School parent Sherry Day Kao dissected a sheep eye in May.

The demonstration was part of the third-grade Sound and Light Unit, a study of the ears / hearing and eyes / sight. After learning about the anatomy of human eyes, kids marveled at the cornea, lens, retina, and optic nerve of the sheep eye, which is similar to the human eye.

Though dissection hasn't always been a part of the unit, Mrs. Kao saw a way to use her professional expertise and initiated the enrichment activity a few years ago. The kids, who observed in small groups of three or four students, were inquisitive and not a bit squeamish!

Kids marveled at the cornea, lens, retina, and optic nerve of the sheep eye.

Mrs. Kao is an optometrist at the University of Michigan's Kellogg Eye Center in Ann Arbor. When not working at her part-time job, she is volunteering at AACS as a room parent, as a center helper, and on the school board. She also has coordinated new AACS community building events this year. Thank you, Mrs. Kao, for your investment in our school!

Photo by Tanya Mazurek

Ten kindergarten, first, and second grade students (and one future student!) proudly wear their Martian Marathon medals! Runners added up 1.2 miles completed on the race day in April, to 25 miles accumulated before the race (through the AACS Running Club) to equal the distance of an entire marathon! Way to go!

Creativity in bloom

By Amy Robson, AACS parent

Ann Arbor Christian School's Spring Art and Music Program was in full bloom in May. Instrumental and vocal music filled the gym while hallways flourished with artistic creations.

Artwork included still-life photos, cardboard sculptures, tessellations, plaster-of-Paris masks, woven abstract designs, colorful needlework on canvas, and detailed nature drawings. A delightful garden of color and textures!

The first half of the evening's musical program, "Composers, Arrangers and Adapters – Creativity on Loan from God," created a rich landscape of melody and rhythm. The sixth-grade band's artistic diversity unfolded as they played the bombastic marches of Sousa, the lyrical music of Tchaikovsky and Beethoven, and the compelling notes of John William's "Raider's March.".

Similarly, the seventh / eighth-grade band's creativity burst forth as they played the "Mission Impossible" theme, "The Chronicles of Narnia," Marches of John Williams, highlights from the "Star Wars Saga," and "The Incredibles." All the music evoked a spirit of heroism and strength. Bravo to the bands!

The middle-school percussion ensembles energetically performed three original compositions with hand drums, tambourines, maracas, and even empty five-gallon water jugs. Not to be "beat" were the budding musicians in the kindergarten class. Their performance of "Purcell Canon" on xylophone-type Orff instruments was truly toe-tapping entertainment.

The AACS elementary school – with sixth-grade assistance – performed the second half of the program called "Life School Musical." In it, characters learned God would sustain them in their Christian life. Four Biblical figures: Professor John Spiritus Baptismo (John the Baptist), Peter, the prodigal son, and Sam the Samaritan, miraculously appear in a box delivered to the classroom. Each charismatically and uniquely (including "Yo, Dude!" comments) assured the children of Jesus' love for them.

Photo by Darren De Zeeuw

Cheerleaders proclaim the message of faith, hope and love in the "Life School Musical" production. Pictured are Eva, Lindsey, Danica, Emily, and Amy.

Meanwhile, three squads of cheerleaders joyfully proclaimed the themes of faith, hope, and love through song, dance, and cheers. Also, kindergartners dressed as bugs were a refreshing reminder that God's presence can be experienced through His creation. The energy and dedication of the performers truly brought God's truths to life.

The artwork displayed and the songs, dances, and instrumental music performed at the AACS spring show certainly reveal an abundance of creativity on loan from God!

Reading opens doors

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

How do you get a school full of kids to read for hours on end? Celebrate National Reading Month!

Throughout March, Ann Arbor Christian School observed National Reading Month with goals and activities to get kids pumped up about reading. The last week was jam-packed with fun planned by kindergarten teacher Barb Dick, second-grade teacher Diane Bella, fourth-grade teacher Kim Windeler, and resource-room teacher Pam Schroeder.

Following the theme "Reading Opens Doors," students kicked off the week by decorating classroom doors to reflect their favorite books or authors. Another day, kids dressed in "something you can read," leading fifth-grader Jacob Adsit to design his own T-shirt with an excerpt from "The Outcast of Redwall," by Brian Jacques. During one noon hour, teachers read "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," by Judi Barrett, as moms served a special hot lunch of spaghetti and meatballs! Finally, on reading-buddy day, older and younger students paired up to read their favorite picture books to each other.

Photo by Marcia Mitchell

Third-graders Regan (top), Ella, and Timothy peek through their decorated classroom door. The third-grade class was excited to highlight author Beverly Cleary in this reading week activity.

Older students were challenged to read 2,009 minutes during the month, while younger kids aimed for 2,009 seconds (or 33 minutes) per day. Kids accumulated minutes during DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time at school plus any time spent reading at home.

Each student who met the goal received a coupon for a free lunch at BD's Mongolian Barbeque. Readers with the most minutes earned $25 Borders gift certificates. Eighth-grader Taylor Boes nabbed the middle-school prize with more than 3,000 minutes while fifth-grader Megan Smit read the most among the elementary students with a whopping 4,877 minutes! WOW!

Photo by Kathy Ann Moilanen

When told to wear something that can be read during reading week, eighth-grader Gabrielle got creative and designed a dress made of newspaper!

Alumni Corner

Original 8th grade off to college

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

In June 2005, Ann Arbor Christian School graduated its first eighth-grade class, and four years later, those kids have reached another milestone…graduating from high school!

These 13 young people, who were just babies when AACS opened its doors in 1991, were the first to experience up to nine years of education at our school, including being the "guinea pigs" of the new middle-school program. They offer a unique perspective of AACS and how it prepared them for the future.

"The biggest way AACS prepared me for high school and beyond was helping me build strong morals and respect for authority and others," says Erin Geldermans. "AACS has helped me to make countless right choices in all sorts of situations with friends."

Graduates emphasize they were well prepared for the demands of high school. "The work ethic I developed at AACS made it easy to handle the workload," comments Matt Vander Roest. Amelia De Vries adds that she was able to take harder classes because she had a "solid base" in each subject, especially math.

Their choices for the future are as varied as their experiences at a variety of high schools. Most plan to pursue higher education at schools including: Hope College, the University of Alabama, the University of Michigan, Calvin College, Michigan State University, and the Art Institute of Novi. Many have the added advantage of receiving academic scholarships!

AACS is proud of you, graduates! Your futures look bright!

Vibrant open houses reflect school

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

If you're reading this newsletter, no doubt you know Ann Arbor Christian School is a special place. But in this difficult economy, how do we get new families to visit our school and discover this for themselves? This year, AACS' new strategies drew in crowds and gave open houses a different flavor.

Photo by Marcia Mitchell

Second-grader Abigail cautiously watches to see if her marshmallow structure will support an orange.

In the past, when open houses were only in the evening, the experience lacked the energy of having students present. This year, daytime hours allowed visitors to spend time in prospective classrooms, interacting with students. Evening hours coincided with lively school activities, allowing new families to tour the school, speak with teachers, parents, and board members, and experience the AACS community.

February's open house coincided with the annual Science Fair and Soup Supper. Prospective students and their parents examined creatively displayed individual science projects and participated in hands-on experiments created by each AACS class.

AACS parents Shannon Waroway and Suzanne Vivacqua spearheaded a new event at the March open house designed to entertain both visitors and eager AACS kids. At the first-ever AACS Survivor Challenge, more than 65 kids (including five to seven visitors) attempted numerous physical and mental puzzles and challenges. Activities included a balancing obstacle course, solving word puzzles, constructing marshmallow-and-drinking-straw sculptures strong enough to hold up an orange, and seeing whose paper airplane design flew the farthest. Tasks were simplified for younger kids so everyone had a chance to succeed. Upon completion, children enjoyed ice cream sundaes! Visiting kids joining in on the fun seemed right at home.

Photo by Marcia Mitchell

Almost there! Second-grader Caleb carefully adds Duplo blocks to his freestanding tower which must reach a height of three feet!

The open houses painted a picture of what our school is all about... families who love God and kids who love learning, fun, and a challenge. Hopefully the message was positive to the 21 new families that attended – quite a turnout compared to two families who toured the school last year!

Eaglets Preschool hatches!

By Marcia Mitchell, Beacon editor

New families exploring Ann Arbor Christian School frequently ask, "Do you have a preschool?" Now we can answer "Yes!"

Last spring, AACS began examining the feasibility of adding preschool to our K-8 school. Board member Conchi Freund stepped in to research, gauge parent interest within the community, and collect information from other preschool directors. After great consideration, the board approved launching a preschool for 2009-2010.

The ad-hoc Eaglets Committee of AACS teachers, administrators, and parents has been developing the program, working toward compliance for state licensing, and researching curriculum. Final licensing approval is expected early this summer.

Following the mission and guiding principles of AACS, Eaglets Preschool will be a Christ-centered preschool for 3- and 4-year olds who are potty trained and of age by Dec. 1.

Using a variety of unit themes, the play-based curriculum will emphasize learning together, exploring God's creation, and building a foundation for elementary education. Daily activities will incorporate math and literacy skills, Bible lessons, sensory and discovery exploration, creative play, and social interaction.

The preschool will run 8:15-11:30 a.m. with 3-year-olds meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays; 4-year-olds meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Volunteers will work on site this summer setting up the "aerie" (an eagle's nest). To help, contact Dan Herrema (dherrema@limno.com).

To donate age-appropriate equipment and materials, contact Jennifer Bryson (Bryson.jennifer@gmail.com).

Tight budget shifts position AACS for the future

By Leslie Doorlag, board vice-president, and Monika Lamine, board secretary

The Ann Arbor Christian School Board has worked overtime on a plan to deal with the effects of Michigan's poor economy, which has brought three years of declining enrollment and budget deficits to AACS.

Addressing these concerns, the board approved the 2009-2010 budget, which the finance committee structured to break even at 124 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Meeting this budget and sustaining AACS long term required some painful staffing changes.

After a combination of cuts and staff leaving for personal reasons, the following individuals will not return this fall: Diane Bella (second grade), Laura Bowen (athletic director), Mark Morgan (music teacher), Pam Schroeder (resource room teacher), and Kim Windeler (fourth grade). On behalf of the AACS community, we thank these fine staff members for their invaluable contributions in service to our students, families, and our Lord.

Changes and initiatives by the board this year included:

- Decreasing Principal Thom Ritzema's administrative time while adding music teaching duties.
- Redistributing middle-school teacher Sue De Zeeuw's administrative duties among the staff. Mrs. De Zeeuw will continue teaching part time.
- Combining the first- and second-grade classes.
- Evaluating students' special educational needs and providing qualified tutoring as needed.
- Combining health / physical education teacher and athletic director positions.
- Starting the Eaglets Preschool.
- Starting Alpha and Omega Care (student care before and after school).
- Cutting committee budgets across the board.
- Reviewing staff salaries and benefits.

These efforts reflect the board's goal to position AACS to weather this economic downturn and continue providing Christian education for generations to come.

Photo by Marcia Mitchell

After the Praise Parade in April, students thoughtfully searched their own hearts, heard the message of forgiveness, and nailed their sins to the cross. Pictured here are fifth-grader Erick and his teacher, Becky Jungkuntz.

Thanking two faithful servants

By Becky Jungkuntz, fifth-grade teacher

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men."
— 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Ann Arbor Christian School benefits from the service of many different people – from recess parents to library helpers to hot-lunch volunteers. We are grateful for the volunteers who express their love for the Lord and for AACS by generously giving their time and talents.

For the eighth year, fifth-grade families were blessed by two local physicians, Dr. Charlie Leland and Dr. Lorri Vander Roest, who freely donate their expertise to teach our "Changes, Challenges, Choices – The Road to Adulthood" program.

Dr. Vander Roest, whose three sons graduated from AACS, helped design the curriculum and teach the first evening program. Dr. Leland, a local obstetrician, soon joined the team, adding his love of teaching and computer skills to design a unique PowerPoint presentation that each year includes pictures of the current fifth graders. With a mix of humor and seriousness, these two physicians help the fifth graders recognize the God-given privilege and responsibilities of adulthood.

With great gratitude, we say to these committed volunteers: "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Photos by Marcia Mitchell

Who can blow the biggest bubble? See related story on page 3.

Upcoming AACS dates:

Back-to-School Picnic
Sept. 2, 5:30pm

School Begins
Sept. 8
(11:45 dismissal)

Middle School Back-to-School Night
Sept. 10

Elementary Back-to-School Night
Sept. 17

No School Oct. 22, 23

Grandparent's Day
Nov. 6

Pancake Breakfast
Nov. 7

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annarborchristian.org

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