

NEWSLETTER

Spring 1987

HAPPY SPRING!

Just as the beauty of this season renews our appreciation for and understanding of this experience we call life, the beauty of ABC renews our appreciation for and understanding of ourselves and others. Perhaps this season of spring is the time to reflect on ABC and the part it plays in our lives and the lives of others.

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Tina and David Rhyne

Just what is "ABC?" ABC is a national program designed to give talented minority students expanded educational opportunities. The goal of "A Better Chance" is to increase substantially the number of well-educated minority students. ABC in Darien is specifically designed to provide a challenging academic program for talented young women who have the desire and potential to successfully complete high school and pursue a higher education.

The history of ABC nationally is long. The program began in 1963 as a joint effort of Dartmouth College and several private secondary schools. Since then, ABC has recruited more than 7,000 minority teenagers, placed them in excellent secondary schools, and supported their efforts as students. Over 90 percent of all ABC graduates attend colleges and universities, the majority of which are among the most selective in the U.S. Schools attended by Darien graduates include Tufts, Wesleyan, Northwestern, Cornell, and N.Y.U.

Although short--a scant six years--the history of ABC Darien is rich with love, friendship, support, caring, hard work, and success. The success of our program and the success of our young women is the result of mutual respect and caring between the community of Darien and our ABC students. These young women give of their time and talents at Darien High School and within the broader community.

Although the students live at the ABC house during the week, they visit with their host families on Sunday afternoons and one weekend a month. Host families provide a home atmosphere for the young women while they are away from home. In a recent letter, a former ABC student, Khisha Pratt, expressed her thoughts and feelings regarding what her host family meant to her, "...I think of all of you each and every day and wish I could see you. It's pretty sad when Sunday comes around and I don't go over to your house. I miss all of that. I hope you guys don't forget me because I'll never forget you. I had a lot of good times with all of you and you all helped me a lot in many ways. Thank you for everything! I'm grateful for all the memories I have. Darien ABC was hard at first, but I'm glad I did it. I got to know myself better, to be stronger and more independent. It was a struggle, but I made it. The best part, besides learning a great deal, was that I met all of you and made friends and a family that will last a lifetime. My memories will be cherished."

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HAPPY SPRING--cont.

Darien families who have shared their lives as host families for ABC students in the past include: Henry & Mary Lynn Ernstthal (Orgyln Clarke); Sally & Bill Sprague (Toni Frost); Kerry & Paul Mayers (Rosa Garcia); Tana & Bernie Gilmore (Kathy Marshall); Pauline & Bill Silvia (Liz Tejada); Rosemary & Russ Peppet (Larose Parris); and Rosemary & David Mace (Khisha Pratt).

Our 1986-87 ABC host families and back-up families are: Barbara & Geoffrey McGrath (host), Suzanne & Thomas Albani (back-up) for Shelly Dugas; Britt & Paul Tiller (host), Jane & Bill Frazier (back-up) for Denise Richards; Carol & John Braunschweig (host), Penny & Alexander Liu (back-up) for Julie Leung; Margue & David Anderson (host), Jane & Stellan Wollmar (back-up) for Sohui Kim; Judy & Elio Betty (host), Carolyn & Tony Murray (back-up) for Okwui Okpokwasili, and Marie & Frederick Martin (host), Sally & John Bassler (back-up) for Edwina Chapman. In addition, Lynn & Fritz Spindler, Tana & Bernie Gilmore, and Henry & Mary Lynn Ernstthal are currently serving as 'back-up back-ups' for the 1986-87 year.

What is it like to be a host family? Why become a host family? Perhaps the words of the Martin family will help us to understand this experience:

Edwina Chapman has three homes. One in Brooklyn with her family, one in Darien with her ABC family, and now another, the Martins, her home on Sundays. That's a lot of homes for a 15 year old black girl and a lot of change. It's a change that is not always easy.

"What do you do with her?" is the question we hear the most. First, we treat her like a member of the family. Whatever we are doing, she's invited to join us and she usually does. She also helps us cook, talks on the phone, has friends over, walks the dogs, feeds the cats, babysits, loves the Mall, and has a great smile. She loves to try new experiences and on one of her first visits went for a sail. Her first real smile came that day when she saw a boat whose homeport was Brooklyn. Providing her with support and friendship brings happiness to each one of the Martin family.

Participating as a host family provides rewards that are hard to express. Everyone grows in the process of caring about another and trying to understand the other person's perspective. Simply, it provides A Better Chance for all of us.

With the continued support of families such as these, ABC Darien will continue to provide an opportunity for bright and talented minority young women to grow and develop. We as a community--and as individuals--will know that we have in some way helped each girl to become all that she is capable of being. With continued support, ABC Darien will remain a source of sustained pride and will reflect positively on Darien's reputation and commitment to be a community of highest values.

WELCOME SPRING!

As we welcome the warmth this season brings and its increadingly brighter days, we extend a warm welcome to our new Resident Directors, Tina and David Rhyne, and to our new Resident Tutor, Nicholas Cameron.

David is currently Director of Music at St. John's Lutheran Church in Stamford and Tina is working for Cooperative Extension Services as a Speech Pathologist with language disordered children and youth. She also works part-time for the Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center in Bridgeport. The Rhynes' caring and commitment to others is evidenced by their professional work and by their work with our ABC students. An atmosphere of respect, honesty, openness, support and love pervades the ABC house. The Rhynes provide "parental" firmness and guidance with the gentleness of a spring breeze.

As the Resident Tutor, Nicholas is helping our bright students to become even brighter. Nicholas' personal commitment to excellence has brought him to the point where he is currently "reading for a Master of Arts in Teaching, literature major" at Columbia University and teaching at Greenwich High School. His commitment to assist each ABC student to reach her full potential is reflected in his interpretation of his job: "...responsible for the girls' academic progress at home during nightly tutorials...stresses writing as a tool in all academic areas and requires that each girl review her writing with him...encourages non-academics (music, drama, sports, leadership) for a well-rounded curriculum to produce girls of outstanding academic ability, artistic merit and

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WELCOME-cont.

superior judgement." Nicholas believes that "between them, these girls possess all these characteristics."

The warmth and brightness of spring are surely found in the persons of Tina, David, and Nicholas. We welcome you and wish you wonderful seasons throughout your lives.

NEW SPRING!

We see the challenges of new growth as we watch the spring crocus push its way to the sunlight through the solid surface of the ground. This years seniors, Denise Richards and Shelley Dugas, have successfully faced the challenges of a rigorous and solid academic program at Darien High School and are now ready to continue their growth at institutions of higher learning. Each girl has been admitted to selected S.U.N.Y. institutions, to Wesleyan, and Shelley to Vassar, Denise to University of Maryland. Whatever schools they eventually attend, the experiences gained throughout their years at ABC Darien will help them to excel personally and academically.

When asked to comment regarding the ABC program, Shelley responded, "I enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere which was very cohesive and conducive to studying. The academic program was successful in expanding my abilities. Most of the people were very friendly and in some cases we were able to break the cultural barriers and gain some sincere friends. In many aspects of academic and social life, the ABC program prepared me for college."

Denise was also "...content with the academics at Darien High School. Academics was my main concern in the ABC program and I think it has lived up to my expectations." When commenting on other aspects of the program, Denise added, "The most rewarding factor about being part of the ABC program was my host family. They brought happiness, love and comfort into my life. My host family has been like my family away from home. I have always been able to talk to them freely. When I was down, they supplied the motivation to continue on and overcome the hard times."

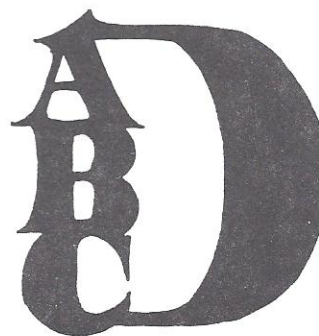
Our sincere congratulations to Shelley and Denise. Thank you for allowing us to share a part of your lives. With continued support,

Darien will share in the pride of ABC graduates for years to come.

We are also proud of the many accomplishments of our four remaining students, Julie, Edwina, Sohui, and Okwui. It has been an interesting and challenging year for each of them. Julie, a sophomore--originally from Hong Kong--has been active in the band, runs track, and enjoys tennis and dancing. Although it is too early to make an absolute career choice, Julie is considering becoming a psychologist. Helping others to help themselves is one of her goals. Edwina, our other sophomore, comes to us from Brooklyn, N.Y...via the homeland of her parents, Guyana, South America. Edwina made her presence known at DHS as a member of the choir, a member of indoor track and girls' softball teams, and a contributor of time and talents to the set crew of Theatre 308.

Sohui and Okwui are the first freshmen to participate in the Darien ABC program. Sohui's background is Korean, Okwui's is Nigerian. Just as their heritages differ, so do their interests and activities. Sohui's favorite courses this year were Math and Biology, while Okwui preferred Drama and English. Their personal preferences in music also reflect differences--Sohui's favorites are classical and jazz, Okwui listens to "mostly everything except classical and jazz." Sohui is currently playing on the softball team and enjoys soccer and bike riding in addition to participating in the less athletic activities of playing clarinet and painting. When not studying, Okwui prefers to spend her time singing, dancing, writing, and acting. As freshmen, the future plans of each girl are still in the formative stage. Sohui is considering pursuing her interests in the fields of math and science and Okwui has tentative aspirations for a career in acting or writing.

We extend our best wishes for continued success to each of the girls. We thank them for making ABC Darien a place of pride in our community.



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

The new life of spring demands water, sunlight, and tender loving care. The new life at ABC requires a different type of support if it is to grow and flourish. Specifically, we need your resources of time, talent and financial support. Please give what you can--when you can--at the level you can. Your commitment to caring is so very important.

TIME: Visit with the girls...Talk with them...Listen to them.
Volunteer as a host family, a back-up family, a driver, house maintenance crew, chaperone, etc. The opportunities for giving of your time are limited only by your imagination.

TALENT: Are you "adequate"...if not excellent... at tennis, golf, sailing, typing, painting, musical instruments, etc.
Our girls are anxious to learn. Help them to help themselves stretch their minds and find and develop their individual talents.

FINANCES: Whatever you can give is needed and greatly appreciated.
Money may not buy happiness, but it does buy the groceries, pay the heat, water, electric, etc. Specific suggestions for needed assistance, be it time, talent, material goods, can be obtained from Rosemary Mace 655-7555 or any board member.

Finally, If you need babysitters, lawn and garden workers, car washers, party caterers, etc., please call our young women...655-6109...They are ready, willing, and able to work!