

The Scholar

A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 20

NO 1

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FRESH FACES AT ABC IN DARIEN

ABC in Darien is pleased to welcome two new scholars, Ayesha Abdul-Fattaah and Jenelsy Lopez, to town. Both students hail from the New York area.

Ayesha attended Mott Hall II Charter School in New York, where she discovered her enthusiasm for History, English and Art. She was invited to Appel Farm Arts and Music Camp for the past two summers, where she indulged in her love of violin and art. At Darien High School, she plans to join the Debate Team, winter Track Team, Model UN, Theatre 308, and the Gay Straight Alliance.

Jenelsy went to The Equity Project Charter School in Manhattan. Jenelsy was born in the Dominican Republic, but now lives in New York. Math and piano are her passions. According to Jenelsy, "Playing the piano and solving a math problem are very comparable. They are just different types of puzzles. Although I get stuck, I never give up because it would be silly to do that when I have the key directly in front of me."

When she is not playing piano, Jenelsy likes to run for fun and play with her 16-month old brother. Jenelsy looks forward to participating in DHS athletics but hasn't decided on a sport as of yet.



It was a warm welcome for Freshmen Jenelsy Lopez and Ayesha Abdul-Fattaah at the Host Family Barbeque.

As they begin to settle in to their new surroundings the freshmen agree that the high school is big and the teachers are very welcoming and nice. Queried about their first impressions of Darien, words that came to mind were quaint, kind, peaceful, friendly and close-knit. Sounds like a good start to the year!

HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS

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- Carolyn and Rick Brook
- Caroline and Frank Burke
- Denise and Jose Cara
- Michelle and Joe DeRocco
- Yvette and Pieter Eenkema vanDijk
- Jolanda and Willem Sutherland

STUDENTS

- Ayesha Abdul-Fattaah (2018)
- Jenelsy Lopez (2018)
- Mahoghany Dolberry (2016)
- Niamani Williams-Coles (2016)
- Danielle McIntosh (2015)
- Merlyn Tejada (2015)

ROPES COURSE! *building confidence, trust and teamwork!*

A flurry of group activities helped the Freshmen quickly acquaint themselves with their housemates, host families and the town. There was tubing on Long Island Sound, meandering along the vibrant paths of the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, and mingling with host families at the annual barbeque. One hallmark pre-school bonding event was a day at Stamford's Scalzi Park tackling the Ropes Course. It was an adventure-packed afternoon of attaining new heights, both physically and emotionally. Here are some of the day's highlights...



Ayesha and Jenelsy encourage each other as they clamber towards the top.



Mahoghany and Niamani "high fiving" at the summit.



Merlyn, grounded for the moment, crouches with Chip as the others scramble up the ropes ladder.

2014 GRADUATES RIDE OFF ON A BLUE WAVE

Jocelyn Mendez and Bettina Arkhurst

Recent Darien High School graduates Bettina Arkhurst and Jocelyn Mendez are bursting with anticipation for the next chapter as they sail off to college. Over the past four years these ABC scholars distinguished themselves as leaders and role models in the community and at DHS.

Bettina excelled in a multitude of disciplines including math and science. Beginning her sophomore year, Bettina participated in the Authentic Science and Research program at DHS. Additionally, she was a member of the National Honor Society, DHS Track (four years), and Dance Team. This fall, Bettina is pursuing a similar core of academic disciplines at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, where she plans to major in Biological Engineering.

Bettina said that she feels her time in Darien prepared her not only for the academic challenges of college, but also for the process of acclimating to a new environment. "I will spend most of my freshman year fulfilling general requirements. I am mainly looking forward to a great year!" She is also looking forward to the many research opportunities present at MIT.

Joining ABC in Darien in her sophomore year, Jocelyn quickly made her mark in music and the arts. She was an active member of the Tudor Singers, the National Honor Society, the Dance Team, Best Buddies and the Gay Straight Alliance. In her spare time, she volunteered at Person-to-Person and interned in the Building Department at Town Hall. Jocelyn's high school career in Darien culminated in winning several awards including recognition for her vocal talent and for her involvement with the Gay Straight Alliance. She was chosen by The Daniel Foundation to appear on News Channel 8 in June to discuss the Gay Straight Alliance's progress at Darien High School.

This fall, Jocelyn is attending American University in Washington, D. C. where she is a Political Science major in the School of Public Affairs and is considering adding Environmental Policy as a minor. Law and social justice issues continue to resonate with her. Washington instantly revealed its irresistible charm to the freshman, leading her to say, "I am



loving school and the city so much, this is definitely where I belong! I was hoping for opportunities in regards to jobs and social activities and I can say one thing: D. C. does not disappoint in any aspect."

Jocelyn was further thrilled that a successful audition landed her a position in the American University Chorus. She also reported, "The rigorous curriculum at DHS surely put me in a good place. I am already used to independent study and research, which has given me an edge in college." One regret of not being in Darien this fall is that Jocelyn is missing her former housemates. "The hard part about leaving was realizing that I would not be back to spend time with some of the strongest, loveliest young ladies I have had the honor to live with over the past several years."

We wish these two amazing young ladies the best in the next four years. Viewing their years Darien as a barometer of future achievement, then the sky's the limit for these two!

A Dream in the Making

Thirty-four years ago a determined group of Darien residents were in search of a dwelling where they could house four students plus two Resident Directors in order to launch the ABC in Darien academic program. To those intrepid founders of ABC in Darien, purchasing a house was out of the question. Luckily the First Congregational Church of Darien was willing to lease a house to ABC for \$1 a year. And so it went for 34 years.

Buying a house remained a distant dream until 2012, when an angel donor stepped forward with an extremely generous gift. With additional funds pledged from the Board of Directors, the dream started to look feasible. The search for a permanent home began anew. Locating a house that would accommodate a minimum of 10 adults in Darien within the budget was no small task. In December 2013, after a year of looking, ABC in Darien bought a four bedroom colonial at 103 Tokeneke Road.

The location close to town was perfect, but it was clear that renovations would be necessary. Shortly after closing, plans to renovate the home were on the drawing boards. Architect Beth Harrington-Howes and local builder Bob Calve of Fox Hill Builders met with a Building Committee co-chaired by Jackie Scott and Lynn Hamlen along with members of the ABC Board Yvette Eenkema van Dijk, Robin Ackerman, Susan Wilson, Jane Yezzi and Vyvyan Burns. Funds garnered through a local Capital fund raising Campaign, co-chaired by Bob Johnston and Mark Scott, provided financing for the improvements. In May 2014, ABC in Darien broke ground on their new home.

Under the adept partnership of Bob Calve and his team working with Jackie Scott and hers, renovations at 103 Tokeneke Road have progressed smoothly. Renovations included expanding the footprint to add living space for the Resident Directors and their family. Construction included



Kitchen renovation included a new layout and new appliances and counters.

A YEAR OF TRANSITION AND MILESTONES

Last August Katie and Pat Egan with their two-year old son Chip in tow, moved into the ABC House to take over the reins as Resident Directors for the program. The young couple flawlessly assumed responsibility for the supervision of six teenage women. Shortly after assuming their ABC responsibilities, they welcomed their second son, Troy, on October 4, 2013. Bringing the head count to ten living under their roof.

Most couples would have found juggling the schedules of an infant, a toddler, and six teenagers taxing, but the Egans rose to the challenge. Seemingly effortlessly, the growing family group settled in to a warm-hearted and caring pattern. The boys adore their older sisters and wait eagerly for them to return home at the end of the day. "They are constantly looking for the girls and asking about them when they aren't home," Katie commented.

Katie earned her Ph.D. in Epidemiology at the Yale School of Health last June. She now telecommutes from home for a Massachusetts firm as a Research Scientist/Epidemiologist designing public health studies, and writing reports and manuscripts for publication, while Pat teaches American and World History at Darien High School and coordinates the school's renowned China Exchange Program; it is a busy household.

This October, the Egans brace for even more firsts, as they oversee ABC's move to 103 Tokeneke Road. According to Katie, "The girls are very excited about the new house. We can't wait to move in and make it into a real home for ABC. This year's group is a positive, upbeat crowd who will adapt well to moving and the changing responsibilities that come with a new home."



Pat and Katie Egan treasure a late afternoon at Weed Beach with sons Chip and Troy.



Chip and Troy explore Weed Beach's low tide life.



adding new bathrooms and two new bedrooms, renovating the mudroom, enlarging the kitchen, converting a screened porch into a windowed dining room, painting walls, connecting to the city sewer line and enhancing the driveway.

"Ring's End Lumber and Fox Hill Builders, along with their skilled trades people, were instrumental in keeping us on budget and on time. Their joint efforts elevated our project to new heights in terms of quality craftsmanship and finishing touches. We would not have been able to afford the same end product on our budget. Our gratitude is beyond measure," commented Jane Yezzi, ABC in Darien co-president.

We are excited to be moving the program into a permanent home. A move-in date is set for mid-October, and here will begin a new chapter for A Better Chance in Darien.

ABC GRADUATE LAROSE PARRIS AUTHORS BOOK

LaRose Parris, ABC Darien graduate from class of 1983 is pleased to announce that her forthcoming book entitled "Being Apart: Theoretical and Existential Resistance in Africana Literature" will be published in fall of 2015.

She is currently Associate Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College/City University of New York. LaRose began working on the book in 2008 while completing her doctoral degree at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Our congratulations go out to LaRose.





DARIEN

A BETTER CHANCE

Opening the door to greater educational opportunities since 1981.

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The scholars stop for a photograph during their trip to the NYBG.



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ABC FAMILY SNAPSHOTS

▼ Jocelyn, DHS 2014, and her mother Mary, celebrate with the Avula and Pelley families.



Danielle with host mom and sister, Yvette and Lonneke Eenkema van Dijk.



ABC Alums Angie, Bettina and Anthia reconnecting



Senior Merlyn enjoys a light moment with her Host Parents Jose and Denise Cara.

Mahoghany and the Burkes at the Host Family outing.



Niamani and her host sister Jessica DeRocco at the graduation party

ABC IN DARIEN FACTS

MISSION: To provide scholarships to academically talented girls of color from underserved areas allowing them to realize their academic and social potential while living in Darien and attending DHS.

ENROLLMENT: Six girls currently from Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Georgia.

HISTORY: Thirty-four years in Darien; 43 girls have graduated from the program.

WHERE DO THEY GO? Graduates have entered colleges such as Columbia, Cornell, George Washington, Syracuse and MIT.

STAFF: Two Resident Directors, Executive Director & Tutors.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Twenty-two local residents.

HOST FAMILIES: Six families host the girls one weekend and one Sunday each month.

RESIDENCE: 103 Tokeneke Road in Darien.

THE BUDGET: \$140,000 per year, covering staff, food, utilities, house maintenance, enrichment expenses & supplies.

HOW TO GIVE: If you would like to contribute to ABC in Darien, send donations to P.O. Box 3204, Darien, CT 06820 or donate online at www.abcdarien.org

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