



The Scholar

Spring 2004

A Better Chance in Darien Newsletter

Volume 9

No. 1

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- Susan & Steve Mulderrig
- Shirley & Carl Nichols
- Susan & Mark Scott
- Barb & Larry Simms
- Terry & Jay Wood

Students

- Melida Burgos, 2005
- Christina Gonzalez, 2005
- Silvia Puma, 2006
- Morgana Coombs, 2006
- Juanita Gyamera, 2007
- Diana Morris, 2007

going for gold

Never a dull moment . . . This school year, our scholars are active in a multitude of activities and organizations. We are proud to say that both of our freshmen have made the honor roll. Diana Morris stepped up to the plate, fall semester, and took on the role of manager for DHS' Freshman Volleyball team and this spring will begin outdoor track. Juanita Gyamera, followed her heart by joining the crew of Theater 308 in the fall but after enjoying indoor track this winter will be throwing the bulk of her spring energy into outdoor track. She also plans to help out at the YMCA's after-school program. Sophomores Morgana Coombs and Silvia Puma managed the Field Hockey and Boys Soccer teams, respectively. Beginning in September the entire house began working on programs for Black History month and the grand effort paid off. Sounds of Africa served as a musical inspiration for learning during a very successful assembly in February, during which Morgana was a speaker. She also

served as a facilitator for Diversity Day, a day during which the entire student body was involved, participating in exercises which attempted to simulate the haves and have nots on micro and macro scales. An honors student and future scientist, Silvia, has chosen to study leprosy for the DHS Authentic Research Program, a three-year research project. In conjunction with this endeavor she was one of eight students at DHS chosen to attend a two-day science symposium at U Conn which focused on many topics, from time travel to West Nile Virus. Next year we understand that Silvia has been asked to be a presenter on her leprosy project—we knew her when! Juniors Christina Gonzalez and Melida Burgos managed the Varsity Volleyball team. After Volleyball season, Melida managed Indoor Track and this spring will manage the varsity softball team. Christina volunteers two afternoons each week at Stepping Stones Children's Museum.



At the Car Wash smile while you work



Chadae & Kendra at Graduation with Jackie Scott



Diversity Team with their man, Duncan

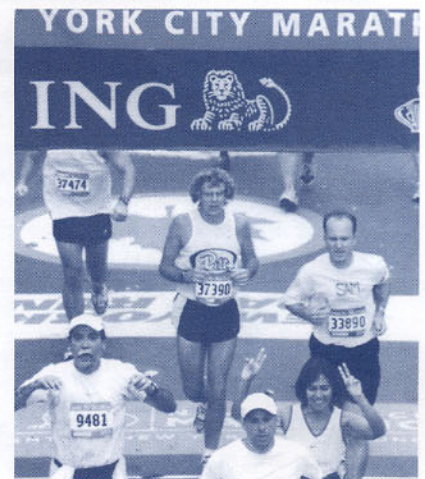
going the distance

for ABC Darien

Scott McGrath, a Darien native now living in Boston, was among a field of 30,000 who ran the New York Marathon on November 2. Running through the streets of Manhattan he raised about \$5,000, and subsequently donated his winnings to **A Better Chance in Darien.**

When asked about his running history, Scott claimed that he had never attempted anything of this magnitude. The idea started as a dare of sorts. Goaded by friends, Scott finally agreed to take a shot at the New York Marathon. After deciding to run, he resolved to run for more than the challenge of completing the grueling task. Scott decided to sign up sponsors and give the proceeds to our program in Darien.

Scott became involved with **ABC Darien** when his mother, Barbara, was a member of the Board of Directors and he was a student at Darien High. The McGrath family was the host family for ABC student Shelly Dugas Thomas. Thank you Scott and keep on running!





Juanita Gyamera and Diana Morris

Juanita Gyamera and Diana Morris have wholeheartedly thrown themselves into the stream of DHS life. We are excited to welcome these fine young women to the DHS Class of 2007.

Juanita, hailing from the Bronx, New York, fits right in the middle of three sisters and has a younger brother. An avid reader who admits to reading anything she can get her hands on, Juanita enjoys playing sports. An honor student at Sacred Heart School, she was a School Ambassador, which is a select group of students who give tours of the school to visiting

students, parents and dignitaries.

Juanita applied to ABC in order to find a school where she could challenge her academic talents. Her favorite school subject is science. Darien High School is sure to be a good fit, as she exudes confidence and self-motivation mixed with a well-defined sense of humor and quick wit. Juanita displays a concern for her community and hopes she can make a difference at DHS.

Her mother works at Mt. Sinai Hospital and her father works at Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. Her parents are originally from Ghana.

Diana comes to ABC from Springfield, Massachusetts. She has an older brother and a younger sister. Her brother, Henry, introduced her to **A Better Chance** when he accepted a spot in the New Canaan High School ABC program. Diana is thrilled to have her big brother nearby but is preparing herself to do without him as he will be graduating in June.

In her free time, Diana likes to draw, write, read and listen to music. She played the clarinet and was a member of her middle school's advanced band and jazz band. At DHS she ran indoor track and will be starting outdoor track this month.

Her mother, a teacher, has obviously instilled the value of a good education. Diana's teachers admire her dedication to her studies and to her fellow students alike. Her favorite subject is History. Last year she helped tutor elementary-aged students in an after-school program at her church. While at Franko Middle School, she was named to the National Junior Honor Society, was a member of the Principal's Forum and was a peer mediator.

Diana's parents moved to the United States from Jamaica, West Indies.

Say "Hello!"

A Better Chance is delighted to announce the addition of seven new members to its Board of Directors. We are fortunate to live in a community where the spirit of volunteerism is so strong. This year, we earnestly welcome Cokey Concannon, Valerie Cooper, Alexis Evanich, Claire Greenspon, Debbie Lang, Barbara Nevin, and Pam Spellane. Their combined resources and enthusiasm are sure to help us build on our success.

And, Say "Good-bye!"

Last June, we said "thank you" to six retiring board members. These Darienites were instrumental in making our program successful and have made a difference in the lives of our students and graduates. Whether hosting an ABC student, driving to and from after-school activities, assisting with college applications, taking photographs, helping at fundraisers, developing our budget, or offering advice, they willingly pitched in where needed. To these dedicated volunteers we offer our deepest gratitude. Special thanks go out to: Dick and B.A. Hand, Lisa Joyce, Pam Lindberg, Claire Locher, and Sue Spain.

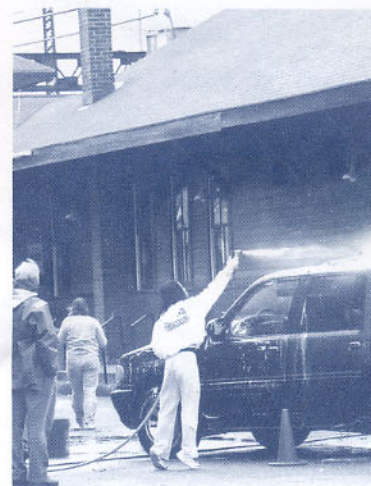
at the car wash

On Saturday, October 4th, the day dawned gray and cool, but that did not dampen the spirits of the **A Better Chance** students as they prepared to make Darien shine a bit more - one car at a time. By 9:00 a.m. the hoses were in place, buckets were filled with soapy water, a cadre of eager volunteers stood at the ready, and cars started lining up. By 3:00 that afternoon everyone at the Depot was soaked. Yes, it had rained around noontime, but that wasn't the whole reason for the soggy apparel. The ABC students, friends, family and board members had just washed and dried nearly 200 cars. Talk about elbow grease!

With the assistance of Doug Anderson, Alexis Evanich and Mark Scott, the ABC girls hosted the

most successful car wash in its history. From start to finish the students took control by organizing a work-shift schedule, recruiting help, making signs, contacting the local papers, pre-selling tickets at Palmer's Market and the Darien Sport Shop on successive Saturdays, and washing cars. Doughnuts, coffee and hot chocolate donated by the Donut Inn kept the mood upbeat and all hands warm on that drippy, cool day.

The money raised from ABC's annual Car Wash goes towards the college application process for seniors and helps defray college expenses for graduates. Thanks to all those who bought tickets and brought your cars by!





Dorothy Height, one of the 20th century's great heroines, visiting with our ABC family on Feb. 7 prior to speaking to a packed First Congregational Church. Thankfully, she has written an awe inspiring memoir recounting her life's journey, which began on March 24, 1912. She has crossed paths with and made friends with so many who have helped shape our world, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt and various Presidents, just to list a few.

Mike Armstrong, presently Chairman of Comcast, graces the ABC house with his gracious spirit. Mike served on the original Darien ABC board and was elected as its second president. Watch for upcoming activities.

in the spotlight

On April 29 ABC and Mike Armstrong will be honored at the NCCJ-Social Justice Hero Awards banquet. Anyone interested in attending can call 203.226.7692.

farewell

Barbara Bristle is certainly in heaven looking down upon all of us smiling and wishing us all well. If anyone lived a life well lived with such a generosity of spirit it was Barbara. In 1997 she received volunteer of the year award from the DCA for her work with ABC. She chaired the Nominating and Transportation Committees from 1994-1995 and co-chaired the House Committee with her husband, David. She was always there for orientation of new students, helping them to feel welcome and adjust to their new surroundings and was always a significant organizer for the ABC Fun Walk fund-raisers. Her energy and cheerful disposition will be sorely missed.



Barb and President Debbie Parnon at Volunteer Recognition Day, May 1997

*I am
a black woman
strong beyond
all definition still
defying place and time
and circumstance
assailed
impervious
indestructible
Look on me and
be renewed.*

*Mari Evans, as quoted by
Maya Angelou, in her
Forward to Dr. Height's
memoir.*

all in the family

Tristan Dakota and Duncan LeXander

Six years and counting . . . House parents Karyn Montague and Steve LeXander have stayed the course and the ABC House is all the better for it. Together with their two sons, Duncan (age 5) and Tristan (age 1), this dynamic duo create a heart-warming atmosphere for the scholars. Karyn is still teaching autistic children at CES in Trumbull, working toward her Masters degree in Education at Southern Connecticut. Duncan is thriving in Kindergarten at Royle, where he especially enjoys his math and science afterschool program, chasing girls and learning new Karate moves--he proudly told me he can count to 10 in Japanese--watch out! Tristan is coming into his own, growing teeth and finding his legs as he tries to run after everything and everyone, keeping Steve extremely busy at home. Steve is also working as a community liaison and coaching soccer at Stamford High School and for Coerver Coaching-Connecticut.

Monday through Thursday, Donna Powell continues to demonstrate her culinary skills in the ABC kitchen. Donna manages to please the palates of six teenagers—a true miracle worker.

Tutors Cheryl Faga and Brian Milo are back at the helm on weekday evenings to guide our students through their academic challenges.

watch for

In early June the *Amistad*, former slave ship, is coming our way. Watch for special celebration events.

must read

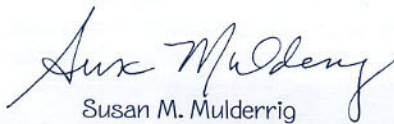
Open Wide the Freedom Gates by Dr. Dorothy Height is a glorious testament as to how one person can better the lives of countless others. From her earliest days, Dr. Height proceeds with enthusiasm and wisdom, always driven by a desire to right injustice to humankind. As you read about her student days you find yourself rooting for her, feeling the pain and anger of a parent who observes her child being hurt and filling with pride as she takes home awards and shines in so many situations. Thanks to her extended family—blood relatives, community, Church, teachers, friends—Dr. Height developed the strongest sense of self, an identity that has propelled her to climb many a mountain with a strength of conviction that has convinced others to follow her lead.

letter *from* the Presidents

Dear Neighbors,

Last spring we said good bye to our two graduates Chadaé Chang and Kendra Barber. From what we hear, they are off to excellent starts at the University of Maryland and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, respectively. This fall we proudly welcomed our two new freshmen, Diana and Juanita. These two young ladies were chosen from an impressive group of applicants who applied to the Darien program. We are excited to give them the chance to excel and to become a part of the Darien community. Diana and Juanita join our upper classmen Morgana, Silvia, Christina and Melida. Since arriving in Darien the scholars have been involved in many school and community activities. These include Theatre 308, Yearbook Committee, Stepping Stones, YMCA and several DHS sports teams.

This year we are developing an Alumni Relations Committee to track past graduates of our program, which has been a part of Darien for over 20 years. Our Enrichment Committee is busy researching opportunities that the scholars could take advantage of during school and summer vacations. Under the guidance of Technology Chairman, Tony Shaw and House Committee Chair, Yvette Eenkena-VanDjik, we are upgrading the computer room with built-in workstations and better lighting. As our existing computers have lumbered into the 'dinosaur age' Sharon Moore has taken the ball and convinced IBM to donate the latest in computer technology to our house--we excitedly anticipate early summer delivery. We invite you to read this newsletter to learn about us and how we provide A Better Chance to six talented and spirited young women.


Susan M. Mulderrig


Mark Scott

Newsletter written, edited and designed by Avery Flowers and Sandy McDonnell



Mark, Susan & the girls at our annual Tokeneke Club picnic

A Better Chance
FOR THE KIDS, FOR YOU, FOR ALL OF US

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