



The Scholar

Winter 2001

A Better Chance in Darien Newsletter

Volume 6

No 1

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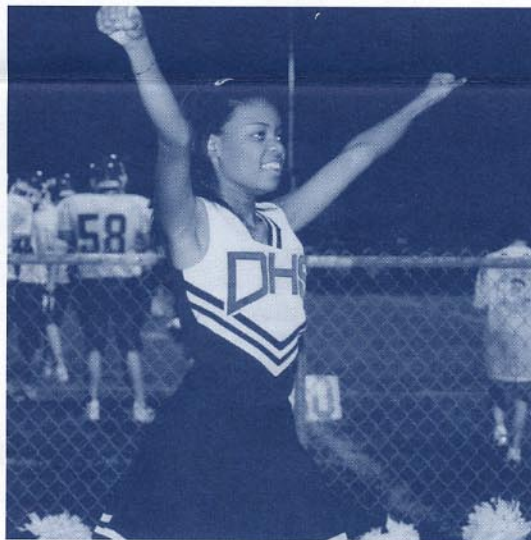
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Students

- Kate Ofikuru 2001
- Linet Martin 2001
- Octavia Donnelly 2002
- Malika Willis 2002
- Kendra Barber 2003
- Chadaé Chang 2003

women of distinction

The ABC house provides a special opportunity for the girls to make their own contribution to our community. We see this in their involvement at DHS, and in their accomplishments both within the Darien community as well as in their commitment to their own house living. Often, however, the accomplishments of these six special young women extend outside Darien. On October 25, Kendra, her parents and Host dad, Andy Chacos, attended the annual Women of Distinction Breakfast in New York City, where the Girl Scout Council of Greater New York recognizes six outstanding women. At the annual breakfast the council also honors one Girl Scout (out of 25,000) as a Future Woman of Distinction, and this past year they couldn't have made a more appropriate choice than our own Kendra Barber! The ceremony was held at Manhattan's Grand Hyatt and she got a chance to meet emcee Deborah Norville and actress Jane Alexander. Kendra can add this accolade to the prestigious Silver Award from Girl Scouts, and the Diana Ross Foundation Scholarship she received last spring. Congratulations Kendra!



Chadaé cheering her team on



Kendra with Deborah Norville at the Women of Distinction breakfast

Vertical Ascent

College is always the top priority and this past fall our girls were able to discuss their goals and plans together with other Fairfield County ABC students. On October 10, the girls met in Wilton with ABC students from Wilton, Ridgefield and New Canaan at a seminar run by a past Dartmouth College admissions officer who is currently a college counselor in New York City. The girls are always working toward their college goals, and this year, as in the past several years, they have been getting some help from the DHS National Honor Society students. Under the guidance of Dick Bochinsky, DHS history and economics teacher, DHS members serve as peer tutors for the ABC scholars. Students come to the house on a rotating basis to provide the girls with extra help when needed. The girls had the opportunity to visit several college campuses with Steve and Karyn in upstate New York, including Syracuse, Cornell and Ithica.

what young Women want

Brains, beauty, and talent—our ABC girls have it all and they sure demonstrated that last summer! There were no lazy days of summer for these girls as they set out to make their mark on the world from coast to coast, and even overseas! Kendra continued her long affiliation with her Girl Scout Troop from the Greater New York Council as they traveled to Switzerland to visit the European headquarters. California was the place to be for two of our girls as Octavia volunteered at the West Coast ABC Orientation, in Oakland, California, as a counselor for this year's incoming ABC students. Volleyball enthusiast, Kate, participated in a tournament on the beaches of San Diego as part of the Starlings Volleyball Club. She will be back on the softball field in the spring and hopes to be part of the Starlings once again. Chadaé was competing a little closer to home

in a different kind of challenge, the New York Miss America Teen Pageant. Linet followed her passion for architecture as an intern at the prestigious NYC architecture firm of Polshek Partnership Architects. Malika was busy juggling two jobs at Mount Sinai Medical Center in the Ophthalmology Department and at a Jamaican bakery near her home in the Bronx. The girls each used their summer vacation to expand their minds, their talents, and themselves, and they had a good time doing so! Kendra is furthering her goal of becoming a marine biologist by serving as a full-time volunteer at the So No Maritime Center—go see her on the weekends. Malika is running for school President and continues with track in her attempt to break DHS's shot put record.



the summer sun shone bright and a warm breeze blew in from the Sound for the annual Host Family picnic held at the Tokeneke Club on September 17th. host families and the parents of our scholars met on the sandy shore to share stories, good company and great food. Debi Lee, Pam Lindberg and the Tokeneke Club staff worked to make it a very memorable afternoon. Thanks to all!

Karyn & Duncan having a cool time at the Oyster Festival

house happenings

There is a new cook. Her name is Diane Powell and she also cooks at DHS. She is adored by the girls and makes a veritable feast each night that gives each student the energy for study hall! Laura Cococcia visits the house twice a week to act as a tutor, helping with problem areas—she is also revered by the scholars. Steve was Assistant Varsity boys soccer coach for the New Canaan High School Rams. When the New Canaan girls soccer team needed a temporary coach, Steve was chosen! He was forced to coach against our beloved Darien girls at the second to last game of the regular season—New Canaan tied and went to the FCIAC and state tournaments. Darien was eliminated and Steve has been sleeping in the driveway of the house ever since! The

Subway Series also made life even more interesting with a divided house but since Steve's Mets lost the Yankee fans are thinking of letting him back in! Karyn continues to make a big difference in the lives of the autistic children she teaches in Trumbull. From the Oyster Festival that everyone enjoyed so much, to getting into a limousine (thanks to Steve and Karyn), to going into Manhattan to see Swing (thanks to Sharon Moore), this school year has been exceptional. It was a very special evening on Broadway, particularly for our two budding actresses—and when Kate, Linet, Malika and Kendra left by the side exit they were delighted and surprised to meet and speak with one of the cast members. A scrumptious meal was enjoyed afterward at the New World Grill.

Where Eagles Soar

live for freedom's cause

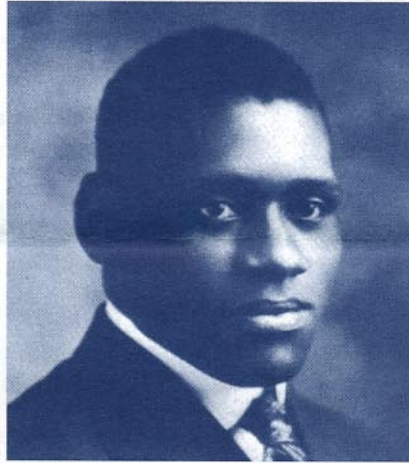
Joe Hill



the formative years of Paul Robeson All-American athlete, Phi Beta Kappa, lawyer, actor, singer, social activist

Paul Robeson's lifelong dedication to peace and equality for all of humanity and his undying faith in the essential goodness of mankind were deeply embedded into his genes, for his roots were most distinguished. Born a slave on a North Carolina plantation, Paul's father William Drew Robeson, he ran away at the age of 15 in 1845 and eventually joined the Union army. The civil war ended and William was accepted as a student in the Presbyterian-sponsored all-black Ashmun Institute, renamed Lincoln University in 1866. After 3 years of classical training, William was admitted into the 3-year theological program. Maria Louisa Bustill, William's wife and Paul's beloved mother, came from a long line of extraordinary people. Her great-great-grandfather was personally thanked by George Washington when he gave the bread he had baked to the general's starving troops at Valley Forge and in 1787 he helped establish the Free African Society of Philadelphia. Maria's grandfather helped more than 1,000 fugitive slaves to freedom via the Underground

Railroad and then went on to found the First Colored Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1879 William was called to become pastor of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey. Pastor Robeson led a congregation of poor blacks in a segregated town but earned the respect of the most prominent people in Princeton. Born in April 1898, Paul was the Robeson's fifth child, and, like his father, was schooled in the classics—Latin, philosophy, history and literature. From the beginning the need to fulfill his maximum potential was instilled in Paul. In spite of the tremendous hardships that began with William losing his pastorship at Witherspoon in 1899 and Paul's mother dying in 1903, they never skipped a beat where learning was concerned. William eventually formed a new congregation in Westfield New Jersey—the Downing Street African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Then in 1910, Reverend Robeson accepted the pastorship at St. Thomas A.M.E. Zion church in Somerville, New Jersey. When Paul graduated from elementary school in 1912 he was the head of his class. At Somerville High he was one of three blacks among 250 pupils and was one of eight students who carried a classical load, which now included German, math, chemistry, physics and ancient history. Paul's teachers recognized his greatness and gave him much encouragement. While he was always a very socialable person, Paul was always on his best behavior so as "to do nothing that would give the whites cause to fear him." By tenth grade, Paul was becoming a football legend and star debater. Douglas Brown, who became dean at Princeton University recalled, "he was the cleanup man, the third speaker. We used him for rebuttal" and generally took home the prize. Hymns and spirituals played an important part in forming Paul's love of music and then theatre. To the chagrin of a racist principal, by the name of Ackerman, at Somerville high Paul was made soloist of the glee club. Reverend Robeson was deeply respected and Paul's white classmates' parents always welcomed him into their homes. During his senior year he learned of an exam open to all New Jersey residents for a four-year scholarship to Rutgers. It was a two part test but because Paul heard about it after the first part was given he had to be examined for all four high school years in the same



junior year at Rutgers

three hours in which others would be tested only on their senior work. Paul got the highest score on the examination that year and won the scholarship. It was this experience that solidified a new belief in himself, "a conviction that none of the Ackermans . . . would ever be able to shake. Equality might be denied, but I knew I was not inferior." In 1915 the senior class planned a trip to Washington, D.C. Thrilled at the prospect, Paul worked with his classmates to raise money for the trip but when told that the Metropolitan Hotel would not accommodate a black student, the senior with the highest grades in the history of Somerville High was left behind. When Paul entered Rutgers he was the third black student to enroll in its 150 year history. He roomed with a black family in New Brunswick as blacks were not permitted to live on campus. Once again Paul distinguished himself in sports, academics and oratory. The Rutgers football team was not interested in having a black join them so when Paul walked out onto the football field the first day of practice he suffered a broken nose, dislocated shoulder and multiple abrasions. As he lay in bed recuperating he wanted to quit and go home but was reminded of his father's belief in the importance of taking every opportunity thrown his way to show others the greatness of his race. He returned to the field 10 days later. A first-stringer stepped down hard on Paul's right hand, ripping Paul's five fingernails out with his cleats. He was so angry he stood up to the whole first-string backfield, heaving a first-class back over his head. Coach Sanford yelled, "Robey, you're on the varsity." Almost immediately he made football history for Rutgers and became known as "Robeson of Rutgers All-American end". When Rutgers met the serious Naval Reserve team composed of all-stars from football powerhouses across the country, the New York Tribune wrote, "It was Robeson, a veritable Othello of battle, who led the dashing little Rutgers eleven to a 14-0 victory over the widely heralded Newport Naval Reserves . . . " Yet each season had its bittersweet moments—when Paul was not allowed to play because of race the team lost or tied. Sam Rosen, a student at Syracuse waited for Paul after a win and recalled, "The Rutgers squad emerged gregarious in their victory, but Paul was not among them. Finally, Paul came out—tall, proud and all alone. 'It was my first insight into a pain, and pride and a struggle which in one form or another continued throughout his life . . . " In his junior year Paul won his Phi Beta Kappa key, an enormous distinction for a junior. In spite of every obstacle thrown his way Paul moved forward with courage, strength, brilliance and grace. Paul was chosen to deliver the commencement address in June 1919—topic was "Interracial Relations." His class predicted that Paul would become the first black governor of New Jersey. Paul graduated from college with a total of fifteen letters in four different sports and was elected to the elite Cap and Skull fraternity—had America been ready to let down her cloak of prejudice Paul would have been recognized as being one of the talented top tenth of the United States. He worked tirelessly for conciliation, integration and cooperation between the races, stating in a speech, "I want my life's work to be a memorial to my father's training and to be not for my own self but to help my people to a higher life." He was accepted at both Harvard and Columbia law schools. Columbia won out because of its location. It was the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance and Harlem was the place to be. Stay tuned for his life as actor, singer and social activist.

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exploring the web of prejudice

Janet Evans, Josephine Anderson and Howard Jennings, principal at Rogers Magnet school, have been hosting first Thursday evenings of the month discussion groups in an effort to penetrate below the surface of superficiality and to try and figure out how we, as individuals and as communities, can work toward inclusion and respect and away from fear and intolerance. The workshops provide a terrific opportunity to listen to the views of others and to express your own thoughts and contribute ideas for . Join us March 1 and April 5 at the South End Branch of the Ferguson Library from 7:00—8:30 pm.

The series will culminate with a visit to Darien Town Hall by Beverly Tatum, author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* on the evening of May 17—the anniversary of Brown v. The Board of Education—at 8:00 at the Town Hall. Her topic for the evening will be "Interrupting the Cycle of Racism . . . the Role of Community Dialogue."

all that jazz *Steve's picks*

Charles Mingus
Mingus Ah Um

Miles Davis
Kind Of Blue

John Coltrane
Giant Steps

Thelonius Monk
Standards

Movies & Stuff

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon

Ken Burns JAZZ (19 hours)

www.HOB.com (stands for House of Blues)

Making Greenwich Home: African-Americans of Greenwich
Bush-Holly House-Greenwich Historical Society until Feb. 28. Call 869.6899, ext. 10 for workshops and talks—quilting workshop for mothers and daughters Jan. 27; craft an Early American folk doll Feb. 4 or Feb 8.

Call and Response: Journeys in African Art *Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven until March 25*



books!!

soul food

Paul Robeson by Martin Baum Duberman

Drawing on manuscript archives, family papers, interviews and FBI files, Duberman gives us a monumental and powerfully affecting portrait of a magnetic artist and a compassionate activist. This is a revelatory biography of one of the giants of the twentieth century."

Paul Robeson: All American by Dorothy Butler Gilliam

"Paul Robeson was the hero of my youth. Dorothy Gilliam rekindles my memories of him in her quiet and sensitive work. She takes care in bringing back this gentle giant who lifted our national soul to unequalled heights and tested our love of liberty." Andrew Young

In the Fall by Jeffrey Lent

Norman returns to the Vermont family farm after the Civil War with his new bride, Leah, a former slave. Trajedy comes but eventually so does hope. "Although we can make of ourselves what we will, we can never completely efface what made us." Ben Guterson

The Language of Threads by Gail Tsukiyama, author of *Women of Silk*

Having just escaped China after the Japanese invasion, the story picks up where *Women of the Silk* leaves us. Twenty-seven-year-old Pei arrives in Hong Kong with a 14-year-old orphan in her care. It's a gripping saga that surely makes us pause and appreciate our freedom and general well-being.

Why She Left Us by Rahna Reiko Rizzuto

A story covering three generations of the Okada family from teir arrival in California in the early 1900's. "I learned so much about the legacy of Japanese-Americans in this country. This is a book that breaks the reader's heart and then heals it the way only a fine story can, page by well-crafted page." Julia Alvarez, author

Red Azalea by *Anchee Min*

An extraordinary autobiography of a young Chinese woman living amidst the horrors of Mao's Cultural Revolution. Simply but elegantly written, Min makes us painfully aware of the extent of the oppression perpetrated on the Chinese populace. Newsweek describes the book "as delicate and evocative as a traditional Chinese brush".

wish list

Desperately seeking large Suburban type vehicle(preferably one that holds at least six people), dining room table and chairs(must seat at least 12 people), chest of drawers in good condition, comfortable study chairs, microwave oven, large casserole dishes, large pans, pasta pot.

If you a have a service or talent you think would enrich the lives of six young scholars, please contact us.

PLEDGE *pledge*

Contributions should be sent to:

A Better Chance of Darien, Inc.

P.O. Box 3204

Darien, CT 06820

I am pleased to support ABC in Darien.

Please make check payable to "A Better Chance." Thank you.

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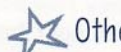
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\$50



\$100



Other _____



Enclosed is a matching Gift Form from my employer

FOR THE KIDS

FOR YOU

FOR ALL OF US



extraordinary Extracurriculars

Now that the girls are back in their Darien home and are settling into spring semester they are more than ever a family. They are also continuing their individual activities that make each of them so uniquely special. Octavia is finding that Broadway just may be her destiny—she stole the show (no surprise!) with her interpretation of the sassy Dorine in Theatre 308's production of **Tartuffe**. Chadaé kicked up her heels with the Blue Wave Dancers and also managed to lend her choreography talents to **Tartuffe**. Both Octavia and Chadaé are trying out for **Pippin** due to be staged in March. Kate's got what it takes on the volleyball

court and in the classroom, as she begins the last semester of her senior year. She was rewarded for her excellence on the PSAT's with a National Achievement Scholarship Award. On September 30th, the girls rolled up their sleeves at the annual ABC Car Wash! Working side by side with ABC volunteers, they made nearly 100 Darien cars shine as they raised money for their college trips and related college expenses. Acceptances are rolling in for Kate and Linet—stay tuned to find out which campus will be blessed with each girl's presence.



Sharon Moore treats the girls to a night of Swing in NYC



yes! Linet's strike!



bowling with the handsome New Canaan ABC guys!

you Can come home again

Shelley Dugas, Jackie Cancell, Okwui Okpokwasili, Denise Richards, Sohui Kim and Keisha Pratt graced the house with a visit. They stopped by the house to visit Steve, Karyn and Duncan and to meet and talk with the girls. Several of them had not been back to the house since graduation. Shelley teaches autistic children in New York state and is a mentor in the Big Brother Big Sister Program. Denise is teaching in the Bronx and Sohui is working for a book publisher. Jackie is developing websites in Boston while Okwui can be seen at various times as a performing artist/singer/actress in Off-Broadway productions. Keisha is helping many as a social worker.



letter *from our* presidents



Reading this newsletter you can plainly see the A Better Chance in Darien Scholars are bright, talented, energetic and involved in a variety of activities. We are not surprised. We know how wonderful they each are. We chose them for their proven academic record and potential for leadership.

The road to being placed in one of the A Better Chance programs is a challenging one. This past year over 2,300 able and motivated middle school students competed nationally to earn one of the 375 spots available. Across the United States, 193 secondary schools have ABC scholars attending. The majority of these member schools are independent boarding schools or day schools. Of the 193 ABC schools, only 27 are public high schools. Darien is one of eight public high schools in Connecticut hosting A Better Chance scholars. The national A Better Chance organization strives to place its scholars in premiere secondary school environments. A Better Chance programs can also be found in New Canaan, Ridgefield, Wilton, Guilford, Madison, Glastonbury, and Simsbury. Since 1981, the Darien community has supported and nurtured an outstanding group of young minority women. With an extensive support network behind them, our scholars must adjust to a new lifestyle and a challenging curriculum. They learn to maximize their efforts, both in and out of the classroom. They are committed to their studies, and they are giving back to our community through their extracurricular involvement. We are currently in the midst of our annual fundraising drive. Each year we must raise all the funds to cover our budget of nearly \$100,000. We invite you to participate in providing a better chance for our six extraordinary scholars.

We hope you enjoy reading about all their achievements.

John Murphy Avery Flowers—Co-Presidents

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