



# The Scholar

FOR THE KIDS,  
FOR YOU,  
AND ALL OF US

A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 9

NO 2

## WELCOME BACK TO THE ABC HOUSE!

AFTER A SUMMER that went by too fast, the A Better Chance house on Brookside Road is in full swing again. Our five A Better Chance students Juanita, Diana, Morgana, Silvia and Melida came back to a refurbished and reorganized house. A major improvement has been the installation of a Study and Resource Center located on the ground floor. The Study Center was made possible through a generous grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation. A donation of six much needed, brand new computers from IBM completed the project. To say the least, the girls are thrilled. Finally technology is catching up with their studies. The house has never looked better!



THE STUDY & RESOURCE CENTER IN FULL OPERATION

## ALL STUDENTS *on Deck...*



ON THURSDAY JUNE 10, 2004, with storms and rain threatening up and down Long Island Sound, the A Better Chance program hosted a festive evening reception on the Freedom Schooner Amistad in Stamford Harbor.

The students, ABC board members, supporters and members of the general public toured the ship, noshed hors d'oeuvres and

**ALL HANDS ON DECK!** Pictured left to right, are Silvia Puma, Juanita Gyamera, Diana Morris, Morgana Coombs and 2003 DHS graduate Kendra Barber. (Special thanks to Patrick Fulton for allowing us to reprint this photo which appeared in *The Darien Times*, Thursday June 17, 2004)

enjoyed delightful jazz offering of Cookie Thomas. At the dockside reception, each student had the opportunity to speak about what A Better Chance has done for them. They all agreed it is a wonderful, life-altering experience.

The Amistad event, jointly sponsored by A Better Chance of Darien and the YWCA of Darien/Norwalk, was arranged to raise awareness of A Better Chance in Darien and to thank our dedicated sponsors. All the current students and A Better Chance alumnae Kendra Barber (DHS Class of 2003), loved touring the ship. They couldn't believe how small the living quarters were. They also couldn't imagine the suffering that must have taken place throughout the journey.

*Historical overview continued on following page*

- BOARD OF DIRECTORS**
- Mark Scott, Co-President
  - Nancy Herling, Co-President
  - Alexis Evanich, Vice President
  - Susan Mulderrig, Corp Secretary
  - Marilynn Aymar, Treasurer
  - Kris Sauter, Budget Director
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  - Kathy Jarrett
  - Debbie Lang
  - Sandra McDonnell
  - Sharon Moore
  - John Murphy
  - Barbara Nevin
  - Patti Schoknecht
  - Pam Spellane

- HOST FAMILIES**
- Donna Holt & Jim Archibald
  - Joan & Mark Bergen
  - Cokey & Jim Concannon
  - Lisa & Kent Eppley
  - Cynthia & Randall Heck
  - Shirley & Carl Nichols
  - Susan & Mark Scott
  - Barb & Lary Simms
  - Terrie & Jay Woods

- STUDENTS**
- Melida Burgos, 2005
  - Morgana Coombs, 2006
  - Silvia Puma, 2006
  - Juanita Gyamera, 2007
  - Diana Morris, 2007



**JUANITA GYAMERA** (Sophomore) enjoyed a relaxing summer in the Bronx with her friends. Juanita is an avid reader, enjoys taking art classes and playing sports. This year she is managing volleyball and she is running indoor & outdoor track. Science is her ever so favorite subject. Our future scientist has a great sense of humor and is very motivated to get ahead. Juanita is honing her study and time management skills so she can improve her schoolwork even further and participate in extra curricular activities as well.

**IN** *step*  
**WITH THE**  
**SCHOLARS...**



**DIANA MORRIS** (Sophomore) reconnected with family & friends in Mount Vernon during the summer months after spending her first year in the house. In the new school year she is looking forward to working on her favorite subject, Math, and participating in both indoor and outdoor track, and volleyball. Diana loves music and ceramics. If there is ever a minute to spare, she likes to “jazz up” the house with her clarinet!

**MORGANA COOMBS** (Junior) put all her energy into the Summer Step Program of Long Island University during June and July in preparation of her SAT's. She also pursued additional course work in Chemistry & Physics. Math is her favorite subject. Morgana enjoys tutoring children at the Kaplan Score Center as well as doing various fun conceptual activities with them. Morgana likes to play soccer and she manages the Boys JV & Varsity soccer teams. She is looking forward to a good school year, and wants to find out as much as possible about colleges. Way to go!



**SILVIA PUMA** (Junior) worked hard during her summer at the Science Lab of Rockefeller University. She ran an experiment on Leprosy. Silvia began her Leprosy research as a sophomore at DHS through an independent study Science program. As part of her research project she wrote a scientific paper. Silvia loved the experience. Not surprisingly her favorite subject is ... Science!

This year she is taking AP Biology and is truly enjoying it. Outside of school, Silvia volunteers her time at the Norwalk Animal Hospital. This is a very exciting year for the Puma family since Silvia's brother was offered “a better chance” in New Canaan. Bravo to both of them!

*for the kids...*  
*for you...*  
*for all of us*



**MELIDA BURGOS** (Senior) spent the summer catching up on family time and beginning her college application process. She expects a strong finish to her last year at Darien High School. When queried about the A Better Chance program, Melida replies that it has been “a long and eventful journey.” No doubt this determined, enthusiastic young lady will succeed! Through A Better Chance she has built a wonderful foundation to help her on her way to being a successful individual. Her favorite subjects are Math and World Literature. She will continue as the manager for both volleyball and softball teams. If she finds any time in her busy schedule, she hopes to work at the Kaplan Score Center. Melida loves to organize and she has been a spokeswoman for her fellow A Better Chance students. Wow, will she be missed next year!

# ABC ANNUAL CAR WASH *made the news...*

THE WEATHER WAS GREAT, the spirits were high, and the cars got a good scrubbing at the Depot, as the girls, board members and their families and friends helped out at A Better Chance's annual car wash held on September 25th. Everyone got wet in the process, but no one seemed to mind.

There was extensive coverage in our local newspapers. Channel 12 stopped by to film the event and interview the girls. Funds raised from this car wash will be put into an account which will help defray the costs of the college application process for each student.

*A big round of applause goes out to all the helpers who made the annual car wash a smashing success.*



**THE BEST CAR WASH IN TOWN!**

◀ Melida Bungo and her friend Steffi Pintero.



▲ Melida and her friend Geena Wardaki are all over this pick up truck!



▶ Juanita Gyamera, Maarten Eenkema van Dijk, and Morgana Coombs



◀ Steve LeXander (resident director) and son Duncan hard at work.



▲ Juanita, Morgana and Silva taking a short picture break



▶ This car looks as good as new thanks to Mogana.

*Historical overview continued from page 1*

## AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE AMISTAD...

A quick historical overview of the Amistad of 1839 tells us that 53 African men kidnapped from Sierra Leone were on the vessel in transit to America from Cuba. They were to be illegally sold into the slave trade. The men revolted aboard L'Amistad shortly after it left Havanna. In the struggle that ensued most of the crew members were killed. Two months later, L'Amistad landed on Long Island. With help from former President John Quincy Adams, the

53 kidnapped men were deemed to be free and were repatriated to Sierra Leone. It was a landmark case presented to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the only time kidnapped Africans were returned to their homeland.

The current ship is a replica of the original L'Amistad. Constructed at Mystic Seaport and launched in March of 2000, L'Amistad is a traveling classroom!



# MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENTS

**A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN** is thriving! Reading this newsletter you can see A Better Chance 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.

We look ahead to a busy year for the ABC program as we launch the search for new resident directors, select new students for 2005 and continue to mentor our five wonderful scholars. The community support is outstanding and we applaud you all for helping us provide this opportunity in Darien.

Sincerely,

Mark C. Scott  
Co-President

Nancy Herling  
Co-President

## Thank you to...

*And all of you in our greater community who support A Better Chance in Darien and make it strong!*

- The First Congregational Church of Darien for providing us the house and unwavering support for over 20 years.
- Darien High School teachers, tutors and guidance counselors for offering the students a better chance and the education to succeed.
- The board members who make it all work and raise the necessary funds.
- Sharon Moore, board member, for her tremendous effort in organizing the Amistad dockside reception and facilitating the donation of the six IBM computers.
- Mr. Bill MacNamara from IBM who processed the charitable request from A Better Chance and expedited the delivery of our six computers.
- The Smith Richardson Foundation for the grant to transform the computer room into the Study and Resource Center.
- Sponsors for the Amistad reception: The Stamford Center of the Arts; C.M. Armstrong, Anne Armstrong; BMW of Darien; C.P. Eaton & Associates; First Congregational Church of Darien; Wilder Gleason; Noroton Presbyterian Church; Parent Teacher Organizations; Rings End Lumber of Darien; John and Charlotte Suhler; Carolyn Swiggart, Esq; YWCA of Darien/ Norwalk (Multi Cultural Bridges); Costco; D'Iorio Printing; Frate's Wine and Liquors; Wine Port of Darien; Czech Beer Importers; Glen Liquors; Horseneck Liquors; and Trader Joe's.
- Doug Anderson and Alexis Evanich for organizing the 2004 car wash, getting the supplies and of course, motivating the car wash crew.
- Sandy McDonnell, board member, who for 10 years, spent hours of creative effort and dedication in creating our ABC newsletter "The Scholar", which was awarded twice by ABC National for being the best newsletter.

## ABC FACTS

**MISSION:** To provide four-year academic and boarding scholarships to Darien High School for highly motivated and academically promising minority girls from disadvantaged environments.

**ENROLLMENT:** Five girls currently from the New York Metropolitan area.

**HISTORY:** Twenty-three years in Darien; 31 girls have graduated from the program.

**WHERE DO THEY GO?** Graduates have entered colleges such as Columbia, Cornell, UVA and Yale.

**STAFF:** Two resident directors, cook and tutors, as needed.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Twenty-seven local residents.

**HOST FAMILIES** Ten families host the girls two weekends each month.

**RESIDENCE:** 11 Brookside Road—provided by the First Congregational Church, maintained by ABC Darien.

**THE BUDGET:** \$100,000 per year, covering staff, food, utilities, house maintenance, enrichment expenses and supplies.

# A Better Chance

FOR THE KIDS, FOR YOU, AND ALL OF US

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