



MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENTS

It is gratifying to look back on all that has been accomplished at ABC this year. With Morgana and Silvia graduating and heading off to college, we are reminded that the conclusion of the school year is always one of endings and beginnings. This is a moment to not only reflect on the girls' success at ABC in Darien, but also to look to the future — to determine how we can help this important program continue to thrive in our community as we

plan for our 25th anniversary. (Save the date for our gala celebration on May 19, 2007!)

It has been an incredible year. Julie and Frances, our new Resident Directors, have done a remarkable job, providing a wonderful, supportive environment for the girls to learn and excel. And excel they did, in academics, athletics and their own personal growth.

With your ongoing support, ABC in Darien is making a difference — both to the girls who participate in the program, and to our community as well. We extend our heartfelt thanks for your support and urge you to stay involved. To learn more about ABC in Darien and how you can contribute your time or money, visit our website at www.abcdarien.com. Have a great summer!

All the best,
Cokey, Doug and Nancy



SAVE THE DATE:
Gala 25th Anniversary of
A Better Chance in Darien
on May 19, 2007
at Woodway Country Club

- ABC WISH LIST**
- New stove cook top
 - Metro North and Amtrak vouchers
 - Basketball hoop
 - 6 new twin mattress sets bunk beds
 - Spanish and French tutoring
 - Scholarship \$\$ for summer enrichment
 - Digital camera or camcorder

Contact Cokey at 353-9731 to help!



A BETTER CHANCE

FOR THE KIDS,
FOR YOU,
AND ALL OF US

- BOARD OF DIRECTORS**
- Cokey Concannon, Co-President
 - Nancy Herling, Co-President
 - Susan Mulderig, Corp Secretary
 - Kris Sauter, Treasurer
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 - Tony Shaw, Comptroller
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 - Francis Janosco, Resident Director
 - Julie Parham, Resident Director
 - Doug Anderson
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 - Phil Meyer
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 - Pam Spellane
 - Mallory Weymann
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- HOST FAMILIES**
- Donna Holt & Jim Archibald
 - Joan & Mark Bergen
 - Kim & Jim Bletzer
 - Wendy & Ned Brokaw
 - Susan & Ted Collins
 - Yvette & Pieter Eenkema Van Dijk
 - Lisa & Kent Eppley
 - Cynthia & Randall Heck
 - Karen & Chris Hughan
 - Susan & Kevin Marks
 - Shirley & Carl Nichols
 - Susan & Mark Scott
 - Barb & Lary Simms
 - Lisa & Chris Stout

- STUDENTS**
- Morgana Coombs, 2006
 - Silvia Puma, 2006
 - Juanita Gyamera, 2007
 - Diana Morris, 2007
 - Whitney Dudley, 2009
 - Melinda Siew, 2009

SPRING 2006

The Scholar

A BETTER CHANCE IN DARIEN NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 11

NO 2

TIME FOR REFLECTION, TIME TO SAY *Goodbye*

It is hard to believe that four years has flown by since Morgana Coombs and Silvia Puma arrived at Darien's ABC House as wide-eyed freshmen students. During the past four years, these young women have grown and made their marks at the High School and in the house. Independent and strong, they are definitely ready for whatever comes their way.

Morgana Coombs is a bright, bubbly, self-described "people person." When asked what she liked most about being in Darien, Morgana replied that it was having the opportunity to make so many new friends and to meet lots of people who are different from those she knew growing up in New York. At first it was hard to leave her friends back home. With her radiant smile and outgoing personality, she was soon surrounded by new friends. Morgana is already looking forward to making many new lasting friendships in college.

Living at the house Morgana gained a sense of belonging in Darien. For three years, resident directors Karyn Montague and Steve Lexander offered guidance and security, while her host families, the Simms, the Bergens and the Marks provided the space to relax. Seniors, Chadae Chang and Kendra Barber opened their hearts to a young Morgana. She recently remarked, "Home is where you make it. In the house, we became a small family and loved each other like siblings. And all of us, although similar in being inner-city kids, have brought different things to the table because of our cultural differences."

At DHS Morgana found a mentor in Mr. Cabrera, her freshman Western Civilization teacher. As a sophomore she was relieved to find herself again in Mr. Cabrera's history class. Morgana says that during her time at DHS, Mr.



SILVIA PUMA



MORGANA COOMBS

Cabrera was there to keep her on track if she started to veer off.

Next year Morgana will attend Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where she plans to major in mathematics, potentially with a minor in African-American Studies. Previously she had considered being a doctor, but now she feels that a career in finance is more suited to her strengths. Additionally, she hopes to be able to go abroad while in college. This summer she is hoping to intern with UBS Warburg, an ABC sponsor.

In parting, Morgana offers these words to the Darien ABC girls who remain behind: "Make the best of what you are given. It's up to you to choose the path which you follow, and you have the option of making it easy or hard, but it all lies in your hands."

Growing up as the oldest of four children in New York City, Silvia Puma wanted more independence.

An eighth grade teacher at the Mott Hall School urged her to apply to the ABC program. And, off to Darien she went. There were times during freshman year when Silvia didn't think she would make it through four years at DHS. She was homesick. Silvia made it through her freshman year and has been soaring ever since. A true trailblazer, Silvia provided the example for her siblings to look outside of New York to pursue their education. Her brother is currently at the ABC program in New Canaan. And her sister will attend Taft next fall!

Silvia feels that she has grown in many ways and is ready to face the world on her own. As a participant in the Authentic Science Research Program at DHS, she spent three years studying leprosy. She was invited to work two consecutive summers in a lab at the Rockefeller University where performed her own experiments. Entering several science competitions

(Continued on back page)

TIME FOR REFLECTION, TIME TO SAY GOODBYE (Continued from cover page)

helped her hone her public speaking skills and allowed her to travel to San Diego and China.

Her time in Darien was warmed by her host families the Eppleys and the Archibalds. Weekends at the Eppley home often included watching hockey games. Although Silvia didn't learn to play hockey, she enjoyed watching the game and all the activity surrounding it. While at home with the Archibalds, Silvia enjoyed watching movies and having the chance to unwind. She is very grateful to her host families for opening their homes to her.

This summer Silvia will attend a five-

week summer scholarship program at Columbia University with classes ranging from English to Science. She returns to Columbia University in the fall to continue her studies with a focus in Science. Since she will be close by, Silvia promises to come back and visit next year.

Silvia feels that her high school experience has been challenging at times but that she has learned a great deal not only about academics but about life. Reflecting on her four years in the ABC program, she said: "From my different experiences I have come out of my shell. Since I came from a big family, I

was used to sharing a room and living with others. It was not difficult to adjust to life in the house. There are so many moments that I shared with the other girls and directors that I will always remember. I have laughed and been entertained everyday that I lived in the house."

On June 20th Morgana and Silvia will toss their white caps into the air as members of the DHS Class of 2006. We wish them our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes as they pursue their dreams at Temple and Columbia Universities. Please don't forget to write (or email)!

A BETTER CHANCE
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THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR ABC STUDENTS

By Jackie Scott, Selection Committee Chairman

Decision night was, and always is, difficult. It is an inspirational and humbling experience to meet such great kids and their families with such remarkable devotion to finding the best education possible.

It's that time of year again. Applications, standardized test scores and teacher recommendations have been reviewed, interviews conducted and acceptances mailed out. No, it's not the "college process", although it's a great dry run! Instead, it's the much anticipated and always difficult selection process at ABC in Darien. As Chairperson of the Selection Committee for the past six years, this process produces some of my greatest joy and satisfaction, as well as many sleepless nights caused from knowing the decisions we make have the potential to change the course of a young person's life.

This past year, over 6,100 students of color applied to ABC National with the hope of finding a high school that could nurture their talent. Of those, over 1,100 applications were sent to member ABC schools for consideration. In the end, only 551 students (or approximately 10%) of the original applicant pool of 6,100 received an offer of acceptance. The process that these students followed was very similar to applying to college. Each applicant had to take the SSAT, get two teacher recommendations, send their school transcripts, write essays and have an interview with an ABC National representative. ABC National then whittled down the pool and sent applications to those schools where they

thought there might be a good match.

This year Darien received forty-five applications from students all over the country. Our selection committee narrowed down the pool to seven girls that we thought showed exceptional promise and invited them and their parents to an interview weekend. Each candidate first spent the day at Darien High School going to classes with our own ABC students. Afterwards, they interviewed for approximately forty five minutes with our Selection Committee, comprised of six to eight Board members, and stayed overnight at the ABC house to get a feel for how the house operates.

These candidates also took four different subject tests to assess their academic skill levels. We spent approximately an hour with each girl's parents explaining our program and finding out more about their daughter. Lastly, we spoke with each girl's teachers or guidance counselor for additional input. At the end of the weekend, we felt we had a strong handle on the personality, intellectual curiosity, drive and moral character of each candidate.

Decision night was, and always is, difficult. It is an inspirational and humbling experience to meet such great kids and their families with such remarkable devotion to finding the best education possible. Many of their stories would bring tears to your eyes. At this time of year, we always wish our house was three times bigger so we could take all the qualified girls that are looking for a place, instead of just two, which is what space permits. This year, after deciding that three of the seven candidates were a great fit for our program, we made an exception and made offers to all three! So, this Fall we are adding bunk beds and closet space and hoping that "good things come in threes".

ABC is an outstanding program which truly can change the course of a young girl's life. It is a great privilege and pleasure to be so involved in the seminal decision that propels so many wonderful young women into highly productive lives that contribute to society.

LIFE BEYOND THE BOOKS

Throughout the school year, in addition to their scholarly pursuits the young women at the Darien ABC house have filled their free time with a broad range of activities organized by Jennienne Burke, ABC Enrichment Chair and Board member – experiences that were fun and challenging, exciting and good for the soul.



In October, the girls attended a **Twilight Bowling Nite** with other local ABC houses, complete with fluorescent bowling balls and great music. Some made new friends, while others caught up with old ones from the Westport, New Canaan and Ridgefield ABC programs. Resident Directors and Board members also attended, giving all a chance to get to know their colleagues and exchange ideas. Later in the month the scholars got into the Halloween spirit with a visit the **Haunted House** at Rye Playland.



During the holiday season the girls ventured into New York City for an exciting performance of **Ballet Hispanico** at the Joyce Theatre, followed by a visit to

Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. The dynamic, highly acclaimed dance company fuses ballet, modern and Latin dance forms into a spirited image of the contemporary Hispanic world – a rare treat for all who attended. At Madame Tussauds the girls posed with their favorite stars cast in wax – from Whoopi Goldberg, J Lo, and the Spice Girls, to Will Smith and the late Rosa Parks. They also made their "television debut," giving interviews for their own mock **A&E Biography show.** This clearly tops the list as the best event of the year!



In January, the girls visited **Madison Square Garden** to watch the **New York Knicks** play the **Washington Wizards** – VIP style. Seated in a luxury box courtesy of our friends

at UBS, they enjoyed great basketball and fine dining. A real winning combination! And as exams approached, they were treated to a relaxing breakfast at good old **IHOP.**



In April, their latest adventure took them to new heights – literally. At the **Education Through Adventures** course in **Stamford's Scalzi Park** the girls, joined by Julie, the house Resident Director,

Jennienne Burke, and a few friends, climbed 28 feet to practice tight rope walking and communication skills. The course also required each person to learn some "repelling techniques" as they scaled



back down the 28-foot wall. During the afternoon the girls faced their fears and challenged themselves both physically and mentally. It was an amazing experience that taught valuable life lessons in a most unusual way.



MORE ABOUT ABC – THE TOP FIVE ABOUT THE PROGRAM

5. Want to learn more about the program?
4. Want to see our students and see other interesting resources?
3. Do you want to know what and who makes ABC work?
2. Want to view recent mailings on the program?
1. And most importantly.....learn how you can help ABC Darien.

Go to <http://www.abcdarien.com/getinvolved.html>

So what was that about "all work and no play?" Well..... you get the picture!