HDFS GRAD STUDENTS VOLUNTEER AS PEN PALS WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

By Mary Lai

Being in grad school definitely has its perks (no, really—I’m not kidding), but after two years of classes, reading, writing, analyzing, and otherwise being completely self-absorbed, I felt a need to poke my head out of the sand and connect with “real” people (read: no one in pursuit or possession of a PhD). I wanted to get involved in the local communities around State College and also do something to help others. I also knew that I couldn’t handle a big time commitment.

The ideal opportunity presented itself as the Nexus Pen Pal Program—a collaboration since 2002 between the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program of Centre County and the Bald Eagle Area School District. I heard about it from graduating student Lori Palen, who, like a responsible Pen Pal, wanted to find her replacement before she left Penn State.

I attended the New Volunteer Orientation and learned that this award-winning, intergenerational program recently expanded to include over 800 children at Wingate, Howard, Port Matilda, and Mountaintop elementary schools. The program is made possible through a community-wide effort of 1 program coordinator, 8 school staff, and 325 adult Pen Pals. According to Shelley Miller, Special Projects Coordinator, the children look forward with anticipation to the monthly letters from their Pen Pals and to meeting them in person at the annual Meet & Greet event in June.

Continued on page 2

By Corrie Beck

List of Volunteer Organizations

A list was compiled of 18 different volunteer organizations and opportunities that are available in State College and the surrounding areas. There is a wide variety of things to be involved in and varying levels of commitment – from a single hour to year round. Each organization was contacted to include the most up-to-date information. Two websites are included that are invaluable to people interested in volunteering (www.volunteermatch.org; www.charitynavigator.org). The volunteer information is posted in the graduate student mailroom.

Continued on page 3

Upcoming Events

Community Outreach and Social Activities

- Happy hour at Mad Mex (3/26, 5:30 p.m.)
- HHD Iron Chef Competition (3/28, 5:00 p.m.)
- Curing Autism Now 5k race/3k walk (4/4)
- Coaches vs. Cancer 5k walk/run (4/18)
- YMCA Healthy Kids Day (4/18)
- Administrative Assistant’s Day (4/22)

Professional Activities

- HHD Research Forum (3/25, 5:00 p.m., Chandler)
- Colloquium - Dr. Jean-Philippe Laurenceau (3/26, 3:30 p.m., Living Center)
- Graduate Student Lunch with Dr. Laurenceau (3/27, 12:00 p.m., S136 Henderson)
The benefits of the Nexus Pen Pal program to the children involved are numerous says Marsha Sackash, Bald Eagle Area Director of Elementary Education. “Our students have benefited academically, with the letter writing activities...socially and emotionally by giving our children confidence and someone to share things with. Positive role models are an important part of our school needs. [The program] truly gives our students a kind of support that they don’t get from a lot of adults—they receive the letters no matter what they do or say. It is not based upon their behaviors or academic achievement but the program certainly has a positive effect on their writing skills and building an interest in writing.”

Currently 12 HDFS grad students volunteer as Pen Pals: Amy Syvertsen, Beth Hunt, Denille Bezemer, Emily Doyle, Heather King, Jessica Heckert, Laura Wray-Lake, Lauren Molloy, Liz Manning, Mary Lai, Michelle Blocklin, and Steph Anzman. Other Penn Staters include Michael Cleveland (The Methodology Center), Claudio Ortiz (Prevention Center postdoc), and Nate Walters (grad student in Crime, Law, & Justice). According to Shelley, new adult Pen Pal volunteers are needed every year to accommodate the demand.

What better way to learn about human development than by building relationships with children in the community? Orientation sessions for new volunteers are held in September. For more info, contact: Shelley R. Miller Special Projects Coordinator Retired & Senior Volunteer Program of Centre County (RSVP) 420 Holmes St., Room 339 Bellefonte, PA 16823 Phone: (814) 355-6816 Email: smiller@co.centre.pa.us


TOP 10 THINGS TO DO IN CENTRAL PA IN THE SPRING

By Steph Anzman

Being a somewhat-native Pennsylvanian, I decided to share my favorite Central PA activities for those of you who enjoy taking a ride and exploring someplace new. Most of these are 45 minutes to 1 hour away.

1. Visit Punxsutawney, the land of Pennsylvania’s most famous groundhog! Of course, this trip is extra-special when it’s on February 2nd, but Punxsutawney actually has lots of groundhog-themed events, such as 5K’s, throughout the spring and summer. Even if there are no special events, you can get your picture taken next to groundhog statues, eat at a groundhog-themed diner, visit the groundhog zoo where Phil and his wife Phyllis live, and buy lots of great souvenirs for your friends who wonder what Pennsylvania is like.

2. Okay, so this one is more than an hour away, and I’m a little biased because I’m from here but...take a weekend get-away to the Poconos! Take a rafting or canoeing trip down the beautiful Delaware River, and then go camping river-side (Kittatinny Canoes is one company that offers such packages).

3. Take a scenic, country ride down route 45 East for about an hour, and visit the Lewisburg Freez in Lewisburg, PA. They have 20-something flavors of soft serve, as well as lots of mix-ins for their signature Freez’e. You can walk around the cute, (very) small town while you enjoy your frozen treat.

4. Head to Tannersville, PA and do some shopping! The Crossings outlet mall allows you to still enjoy some outdoors time while shopping.

5. Visit R.B. Winter State Park, where there is a lake, beach, and hiking trails (including a leisurely loop through the woods). This beach is often less crowded than more local State Parks (although Bald Eagle, Black Moshannon, and Whipple Dam are all nice too). There is a lake, beach, and hiking trails (including a leisurely loop through the woods).

6. Check out the Nittany Valley winery, not too far from State College (call ahead to sign up for a $5 tour, includes a wine glass and tasting).

7. Visit Penn’s Cave in Centre Hall, PA.

8. Visit R.B. Winter State Park, where there is a lake, beach, and hiking trails (including a leisurely loop through the woods). This beach is often less crowded than more local State Parks (although Bald Eagle, Black Moshannon, and Whipple Dam are all nice too). There is a lake, beach, and hiking trails (including a leisurely loop through the woods).

9. Enjoy lunch at the Bullfrog Brewery in Wingate, PA (they have some delicious summer salads, and I’ve heard good things about the burgers).

10. Visit Reptiland in Allenwood, PA. It actually has lots of groundhog-themed events, such as 5K’s, throughout the spring and summer. Even if there are no special events, you can get your picture taken next to groundhog statues, eat at a groundhog-themed diner, visit the groundhog zoo where Phil and his wife Phyllis live, and buy lots of great souvenirs for your friends who wonder what Pennsylvania is like.
Habitat for Humanity – November 7, 2008

Many people volunteered to be a part of the Habitat for Humanity’s day of construction. We all arrived at the house on the north side of State College on a Saturday morning and were met with beautiful weather. Everyone enjoyed the break from school work and had a good time visiting with each other and meeting new people. There were plenty of jobs to be done on the construction site, so we all kept fairly busy. Most people had no experience but that didn’t stop us from getting involved in many different kinds of work. Some of the many jobs were performed were hanging siding, digging a ditch, being assistants for the more experienced contractors there, cutting siding and many more. Overall, it was a big success with nearly everyone excited about our next Habitat Day.

Visiting Senior Center – January 27, 2009

A small group of people (Rebecca Madill, Salem Wolk, Amanda Leggett, and I) drove together to the Bellefonte Senior Center over the lunch hour on a Tuesday afternoon. We weren’t really sure what to expect, but I think we all were very pleasantly surprised at how the afternoon transpired. We sat down in their living room area and chatted with a few of the seniors there. Since it was their game day we decided to join in and play Rummikub, which none of us knew how to play. Of course, the people were so nice and taught us the rules and some insider’s tricks. We ended up staying 20 minutes past our planned leaving time because we were having such a great time. I can honestly say that I genuinely enjoyed myself. The women we met were fascinating with wonderful stories of living in central Pennsylvania, their families and life experiences. The center’s coordinator was very generous and welcoming. This was personally, my favorite volunteer activity.

Food Collection – November, 2008

We collected lots of food and grocery gift cards for the local food bank this year. There were at least four huge boxes of items! Everyone was very generous and the volunteers at the food bank were really grateful for our efforts. This is a yearly activity that we hope can continue to grow.

Coats and Other Winter Gear Collection – December, 2008

Donated to the local Big Brother Big Sisters organization, we collected 10 winter coats and many other winter-weather gear such as gloves and scarves. People really responded well to this, exceeding our expectations for the number of donations. We received a very heartfelt letter of thanks from the group (see excerpts below).

Recipe: Baked Ziti Florentine

By Steph Anzman

I made this recipe (serves 6) for some fellow HDFSers this semester, and we all enjoyed it. This recipe serves as comfort food just like typical baked ziti, but is actually a bit healthier due to the whole grain pasta, part-skim cheeses, and the addition of spinach!

1 box of whole grain or whole wheat penne, ziti, or rotini
2 cups of marinara sauce (I love the roasted garlic sauce at Wegman’s)
1 cup part-skim ricotta cheese
1 cup thawed frozen chopped spinach
1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cook pasta until al dente and drain. Place pasta in 13 x 9 baking dish. Add sauce and combine. Combine ricotta cheese and thawed spinach in a medium bowl. Add this to pasta mixture and combine. Sprinkle shredded mozzarella on top of pasta. Bake until cheese is melted and mixture is hot and bubbly (30-40 minutes).
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR ENGAGEMENT!

Megan Ward and Ted Harvey got engaged in State College, PA in February 2008. They have a June 12, 2009 wedding planned in Ogunquit, Maine.

Harshini Shah and Sudeep Nambiar were engaged in State College, PA on June 22, 2008. The wedding will take place in India.

Corrie Beck and Adam Laker were engaged on August 2, 2008 in Stein am Rhein, Switzerland. They will be married in Indianapolis, Indiana on January 2, 2010.

Steph Anzman and Mike Frasca got engaged on August 8, 2008. They are planning a June 19, 2010 wedding in Lewisburg, PA.

ACADEMIC MILESTONES

Master's Theses
Summer/Fall 2008
- Sandra Abarca
- Michelle Blocklin
- Natasha Dmitrieva
- Jess Dollar
- Emily Doyle
- Allison Groenendyk
- Heather King
- Siwei Lui
- Pham Phuong
- Anna Soli
- Sara Vasilenko

Candidacy
Summer/Fall 2008
- Steph Anzman
- Molly Countermine
- Jess Dollar
- Kyungmin Kim
- Heather King
- Mary Lai
- Beth Riina
- Brandi Rollins
- Harshini Shah
- Sara Vasilenko

Spring 2009
- Sandra Abarca
- Michelle Blocklin
- Natasha Dmitrieva
- Chris Fortunato

Comps
Fall 2008
- Liz Cipriano
- Andrea Finlay
- Kristi Voegtline

Spring 2009
- Joche Gayles
- Melissa Lippold

Doctoral Dissertations
Fall 2008
- Megan Baril
- Kelly Davis
- Monique Faulk

Spring 2009
- Alice Davidson