



Ben-Hem Happenings

The Bennett-Hemenway PTO

December 2013 Newsletter



Art for Art's Sake

Written by Krissy Fernandes, PTO Co-President

Creativity is essential to student achievement and success. Extensive research demonstrates that students who are highly engaged in the arts, humanities, and sciences do better in school and are more involved in their communities. The arts are especially effective in reaching young people at risk of failure by giving them tools to explore and interpret their experiences in ways no other subjects can.

Unfortunately, schools do not always have the resources or time needed to provide an adequate education in the arts. A recent study by the Center on Education Policy indicates that the federal No Child Left Behind law, with its focus on standardized-test scores in math and reading, has led to a 16 percent decline in the time devoted to art and music instruction in public schools over the last six years. (Source: The Massachusetts Cultural Council)

To help off-set this decline, organizations have been established at the state, town and school levels to ensure that our students are exposed to the arts throughout their K-12 education. At Ben-Hem, the PTO funds a Cultural Arts committee that focuses on bringing in presentations and acts to the school that focus on everything from music and theater to dance and illustration.

This year, the PTO will spend over \$13,000 on Cultural Arts. Already this year, students have enjoyed programs such as Fireseed Arts' performance on environmentally conscious art, the States of Matter science presentation to the Fourth Grade by the Museum of Science, and an interactive performance of the Nutcracker by the Impulse Dance Center in Natick for the First Grade. These are just 3 of over 14 programs planned for Ben-Hem students this school year.

It takes more than funding for the PTO to provide such great exposure to the arts for our students. Each year, a committee of parent volunteers is put together to coordinate the programs that are brought into the school. The Cultural Arts committee is currently chaired by Kim Knowlton, parent of a Third Grader at Ben-Hem and a Fifth Grader at Wilson. Kim has volunteered on the Cultural Arts committee for several years and stated that their goal is to bring more art to the school "for art's sake" and to reach out to kids that have an interest in performing arts.

The Cultural Arts committee is organized so that any parent that has an interest helping out can get involved. Every year, a parent volunteer is assigned to each grade to help coordinate with the teaching staff on which acts to bring in. In addition, there is a volunteer assigned to coordinate the all-school performances.

The first responsibility of the committee members is to identify which programs to bring to Ben-Hem each year. This decision making process is made easier due to the input from teachers and the town-wide and regional Cultural Arts groups. There is a monthly meeting in which all of the Natick Schools come together to discuss recommendations for performances, and feedback on programs that they have offered in the past. Ben-Hem is also a member of the West Suburban Cultural Arts Committee which puts on several events each year to showcase programs so that schools can preview the acts before making the decision to bring them into their school. The criteria that the Cultural Arts committee uses to evaluate new acts includes: the content of the program; the age appropriateness; and for the grade level programs, how well it ties into the curriculum. The committee also tries to bring in a wide variety of art forms throughout the year including musical acts, story tellers, theater, authors, illustrators, painters, dance and more.

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Art for Art's Sake

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Once the programs have been identified, one of the biggest responsibilities of the volunteers is juggling the schedules of the performers and the school. There are many things that need to be considered in the scheduling of an act including when the cafeteria is available, when classes have their specials, and how many performances are required to reach all students. After the schedule has been finalized, it is just a matter of having a volunteer at the school the day of the performance to ensure that everything goes smoothly.

While the Cultural Arts committee is far along in the planning for the programs to offer this year, there are still many opportunities available for parents to get involved and volunteer. If you would like to help out by evaluating programs, scheduling acts, or helping at the school the day of a performance, please contact Kim at culturalarts@benhempto.org.

Thank you to Kim and the rest of the Cultural Arts Committee (Kara Bettigole, Kathy Wick, Michelle Lieberman) for all of their efforts so far this year. You can find out more about the programs being offered this year online at <http://www.benhempto.org/getinvolved/cultural-arts>. A few of the upcoming performances that your students can look forward to are: Tanglewood Marionettes on January 14 (Kindergarten), Illustrator Eujin Neilan at the end of January (Second Grade), and author and illustrator Suzy Kline in January/February.

SCHOOL HAPPENINGS

Teacher Appreciation Holiday Brunch

On Tuesday, December 17, the PTO held its annual Teacher & Staff appreciation brunch. The Teacher's Lounge was lined with buffet tables packed with delicious foods and festive decorations. Ben-Hem Teachers and Staff were invited to come by before school, or throughout the day to relax and reenergize before the Winter Break. The feedback from those that we spoke to was that they enjoyed the brunch, especially the yogurt and granola station, fruit salad, bagels, and trays of pastries.



The Holiday Brunch is held every year and is sponsored by the PTO in order to thank the Teachers and Staff that make Ben-Hem a good environment for our children to learn in.

HELP WANTED

The PTO has some great programs coming up in the second half of the school year and we need more volunteers in order to ensure that they are successful. Below are just a few of the volunteer opportunities available.

Cultural Arts

Help coordinate the arts performances and programs that are offered to the students at Ben-Hem this year. There are many different ways to volunteer. Contact Kim at culturalarts@benhempto.org for more information.

Seed to Harvest

The planting season will soon be upon us. Get involved now to start planning what will be planted and when, or to get on list to help maintain our school garden throughout the Spring/Summer. This is a great way to volunteer and get your kids interested in gardening and healthy eating habits. Contact seedtoharvest@benhempto.org

Ben-Hem Happenings

Help is needed in developing content for the Ben-Hem Happenings monthly newsletter. Volunteer to coordinate Teacher Spotlights or write a feature article. Work on your own schedule. Contact Krissy at happenings@benhempto.org.

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COMING SOON

January 17: Sports Team Day (School Spirit)

Students can to show their school spirit by wearing their favorite sports team gear to school.

January 24: International Night

Ben-Hem's annual International night is an opportunity for students to become an expert on a particular country and to "visit" the countries shared by their fellow Bobcats.

([http:// www.benhempto.org/getinvolved/student-events](http://www.benhempto.org/getinvolved/student-events))

February 4: PTO Meeting

Join other Ben-Hem parents, teachers and administrators to kick-off the new year and help plan the events, activities and agenda for the second half of the school year.



February 28: Ben-Hem Talent Show

Students Olivia Dalicandro and Katrina Barnes introduced this new event at the December PTO Meeting. Students can sign-up to show-off their talents to the Ben-Hem community. More information will be sent home after the Winter Break.

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Michelle Lieberman! She is a member of Cultural Arts, working to organize events for the Second Grade.



Q: How many students do you have at Ben-Hem this year? What grades are they in?

A: I have two boys at Ben Hem. Jacob is in second grade in Ms. Letovsky's class and Danny is in Kindergarten in Ms. Muller's class.

Q: How long have you lived in Natick?

A: We have lived in Natick for 6.5 years.

Q: When did you first volunteer with the Ben-Hem PTO?

A: This is my first year volunteering with the Ben Hem PTO.

Q: What prompted you to get involved?

A: I got involved for a couple of different reasons. I wanted to get involved so that I would meet more people within the Ben Hem community and so that I could make my children's experience at Ben Hem better.

Q: What was your most recent volunteer experience? What did you like best about it?

A: My most recent volunteer experience was in the fall when I helped label some books for all of the classroom's libraries. I loved helping out with that because I love to read and I hope that having these books in each class will help develop someone else's love of reading!

Q: What do you do when you aren't volunteering?

A: When I am not volunteering, I am busy being a mom to my two sons. I also work four days a week as an optician at my family's optical shop. In my spare time, I love to read and love to see my friends.

Q: What volunteer opportunities interest you the most?

A: I am most interested in the Cultural Arts. I love that this group is dedicated to enriching the lives of the students at Ben Hem.

Q: What do your kids think about your volunteering at their school?

A: I think that my kids like when I volunteer at the school. They like when they see me in the hallways unexpectedly.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Where Teachers Answer to the STUDENTS!

Each month, several student volunteers will interview teachers at Ben-Hem with questions of their choice. A subset of the questions will be published in this newsletter. You can view the full interviews and pictures online at: www.benhempto.org/happenings.

Student Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of student volunteers to interview their favorite teachers. If you are interested, have your parent email us at happenings@benhempto.org.

Mrs. Wraight (Second Grade Teacher)

Interviewed by Angelina Wing (2nd Grade)

Q: What is your favorite color?

A: Green

Q: What is your favorite TV show?

A: Dancing with the Stars

Q: Who is your favorite movie star?

A: Diane Keaton

Q: What is your favorite grocery store?

A: Stop and Shop

Q: What is your favorite food?

A: Chocolate chip cookies

KID'S CORNER

WORD FIND: Find the words in the list in the table below. Words can be up, down, across, backwards and diagonal.

Q	W	A	E	T	C	E	D	C	W	X	S	Y	G	B	S	N	O	G	O
H	D	T	Y	M	I	T	T	E	N	S	K	N	L	J	U	I	M	R	P
U	I	J	K	O	P	L	T	F	F	D	N	E	U	C	I	D	W	E	X
X	R	Q	A	Z	S	R	E	V	B	Y	J	E	E	W	G	Y	S	E	H
T	V	N	W	M	R	U	V	P	E	C	V	D	C	Z	Y	T	K	D	G
W	O	N	S	T	N	U	K	L	M	G	N	U	I	D	N	T	I	C	F
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I	K	N	R	W	O	N	B	S	X	O	F	U	J	M	P	E	D	V	E
O	R	T	E	H	L	Z	A	T	N	E	W	Y	E	A	R	Y	W	O	N
B	D	W	O	G	A	R	R	C	Y	N	U	H	F	P	V	E	D	H	J



WORD LIST:

ICE
SLED
NEW YEAR
SKIING
SNOW
FROST
VACATION
FIREWORKS
SCARF
MITTENS