



Ben-Hem Happenings

The Bennett-Hemenway PTO

October 2013 Newsletter



Seed to Harvest –

Planting the seeds of education at Ben-Hem

Written by Erin Martinovich, Ben-Hem Parent

In 2012, what was then a dandelion-filled field, behind the kindergarten and fourth grade classrooms, underwent an amazing transformation. Thanks to the imagination and dedication of two Ben-Hem moms, this area has become a vibrant living and learning space, known to the Ben-Hem community as the Seed to Harvest school garden project.

It all began in early 2012 when Kathy Cappellano, a registered dietician and member of the Natick Public School’s School Health Advisory Committee, and Maureen McMahon, who has an extensive background in food preparation and management, had a vision to create a community garden. They had high hopes for the project, knowing it would be an undertaking that would consist of a lot of hard work and effort.



Seed to Harvest Founders Maureen McMahon & Kathy Cappellano

“We were inspired to launch this project for many reasons. It was a combination of wanting kids to appreciate how food is grown and offer them the opportunity to enjoy fresh, unprocessed foods,” said Kathy Cappellano. “We feel it’s critical to expose kids to a variety of foods including fresh fruit and vegetables early on (during the preschool and elementary school years) when families form the basis for lifelong eating habits. Give them other options than chicken fingers, pasta, burgers and dogs.”

“I was excited to get involved with this project as I remember what a positive impact having a garden was on my childhood,” shared Maureen McMahon. “Nature is a great teacher and children have a limited time in their daily schedule to experience it. My hope is that the school garden gives teachers new options when trying to engage their students. The garden is a great vehicle to teaching about food, seasons, cultures, math, science, art, and so much more.”

Initially funded by a grant from the Natick Education Foundation, the Seed to Harvest school garden project was born. The mission of the garden project is simple – to teach children to become healthy adults by making healthy food choices, instill the basics of growing food and contribute to a thriving community. Boasting 10 raised planter beds, you can find fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers all year long. “I feel the garden project has given the students new awareness of where their food comes from and the effort needed to create it,” shared Maureen. “I also hope it gives the students new interest and pride in their school surroundings.”

The garden was constructed by Ben-Hem parent volunteers who built and planted the garden beds that were then filled

with loam, a soil composed of sand, silt and clay in relatively even proportions. It’s considered ideal for gardening and was generously donated by WindyLo Nurseries. This initial planting yielded a donation of crops to the Natick Food Pantry.

In September of 2012, the gardeners harvested over 7 pounds of produce and herbs which were donated to Bill’s and used as ingredients in the pizzas and salads served at a Ben-Hem fundraiser, this fall. Throughout autumn, the Seed to Harvest program created awareness for their crops at sponsored farmer’s markets at school dismissal.

Student and parent volunteers are a crucial ingredient in the success of this program. “One of the my favorite memories was watching the third and fourth graders sift through compost that we put on tarps last spring to show them how their food scraps collected during lunch, were broken down with the help of worms,” Kathy said. “Kids had plastic gloves. Some loved playing with the worms. Others, not so much!”

Volunteers can only go so far without the support of wonderful sponsors. The generosity of businesses and services within the town helped lay the foundation for a successful annual program.

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Seed to Harvest – Planting the Seeds of Education at Ben-Hem

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“We are so grateful for the generous support of local businesses such as Metrowest Irrigation, who donated and installed an irrigation system, and the facilities folks in the town who provided the plumbing and electrical work to make the installation possible. Our custodians have helped with materials and supplies and staff from the Department of Public Works delivered wood chips. Fran's Flower's, Tilly's, Windy Lo Nurseries, White Flower Farm, Mass Horticulture Society and E. Bailey Garden Design have all contributed their expertise for planting and garden materials,” remarked Kathy.

“I think the biggest reward for me was seeing how excited the kids were in the garden space. I loved hearing their questions and seeing their enthusiasm. An unexpected reward was meeting some wonderful, dedicated people in our community,” said Maureen. “I am grateful for all the connections I have made!”

In the Spring of 2013, the Seed to Harvest program entered its second year and was able to provide significant enhancements such as signage, storage and perennial rock gardens, through the successful application of a second NEF grant. Additionally, Kathy and Maureen sought to secure even greater opportunities for student volunteerism by partnering with ASAP. The outcome of that partnership became the launch of a six-week session titled ASAP Grows.



Ben-Hem is extremely grateful for the incredible hard work and efforts of Kathy Capellano and Maureen McMahon for launching this new program. The Bennett-Hemenway PTO will be continuing their fine efforts with the help of parent volunteers including Kate Clancy and Joanne Barros who have already come forward to help. Kate is best known within Seed to Harvest as the artist who painted the beautiful panels on vibrant display in the space.

For more information about the program, please visit <http://seedtoharvest.benhempto.org>. To volunteer, please contact go to <http://volunteer.benhempto.org> or email seedtoharvest@benhempto.org.

SCHOOL HAPPENINGS

The First Annual Ben Hem Family Picnic was an overwhelming success!

Written by Jen Little, PTO Co-Vice President

The weather was perfect for a picnic. It was warm and sunny, without a cloud in the sky.

Close to 75 families spread their picnic dinners out on the field by the gazebo. Parents enjoyed a relaxing dinner and were able to socialize, while the kids had a wonderful time playing on the new playground. Several parents helped supervise ongoing baseball and basketball games, as well as games of catch and soccer. Mr. Kelly also stopped by to say, "Hello," in between commitments, despite his very busy after school schedule.



John Cice and the Natick High School Jazz Ensemble Band

The real highlight of the evening was the performance by the Natick High School Jazz Ensemble Band. Close to 25 Natick High School students showed up in full uniform to play for our Ben Hem community. The jazz band instructor, John Cice, introduced each number and gave a brief history of the music. They played for the last half of the picnic, just as the sun was beginning to set. This, coupled with the wonderful company and a beautiful, color changing sky, transformed the evening into a fabulous garden party.

It became dark soon after the music ended and most families headed home, leaving behind a spotless playground and field; which is quite impressive, given the number of families present.



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Monsters and fairies and ghosts, oh my!

Written by Tracey Gondelman, PTO Co-President

Over 230 Ben-Hem families came out on Friday, October 25th to celebrate Halloween at the PTO's annual Monster Mash family event. DJ Codie played the latest music while kids and special guest Benny the Bobcat showed off their moves on the dance floor. Others took to making Halloween crafts, playing Halloween games and trying their hand at feeling and guessing our special goopy creations. If that wasn't enough, children also enjoyed a bewitched reading of "Room on the Broom" at Halloween story time before scurrying off to find their scavenger hunt items. Several teachers were spotted at the event, including Mrs. McShane, Ms. Craig and Ms. Barbato.



DJ Codie organizes a Halloween Dance-off for the kids.

Pulling off this expanded Monster Mash event took the help and coordination of over 25 volunteers. Parents helped with everything from cutting pieces of construction paper for crafts to handing out snacks and ensuring the building was clean and ready to start school on Monday. The effort of all of the volunteers is greatly appreciated and based on the smiling faces leaving that night it is safe to say that fun was had by all!

Have a happy and safe Halloween!

FROM THE NURSES OFFICE

Welcome back to another school year!

We are glad to have the opportunity to share information with you through the PTO newsletter.

We would like to begin this month with a few reminders and announcements:

- Please send your children off to school with a good start. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Children who don't have breakfast, have gone 8 -1/2 hours overnight without food and must wait several more hours until snack time. Without food they may become irritable, restless, feel tired, or come to the clinic with complaints of a stomach ache and/or a headache. A good breakfast is one that

includes a good deal of protein and complex carbohydrates, which will help sustain your child until snack or lunch time.

- Please remember that no matter what grade your child is in, it is a good idea for them to have a spare set of weather appropriate clothing. You never know when an unexpected food spill or playground issue, might lead to soiled clothing. Having a spare set will save you from having to bring other clothing in. This will also save your child from potential embarrassment and having unnecessary time out of his/her classroom.
- Parents of all 4th graders: Please send in proof of a physical exam, that was performed from January, 2013 to the present. Massachusetts mandates that all students in grades K, 4, 7, and 10, have current physicals on file in the health clinic.
- We will begin vision and hearing screenings for students in grades 1- through 4 in the next few weeks. Students in grade 1 receive vision, hearing, and BMI screenings. Students in grades 2 and 3 receive vision and hearing screenings, and students in grade 4 receive vision and BMI screenings. If your child wears glasses, please make sure that he/she has them in school.
- Fall allergy season is upon us. Currently, we are seeing children who are sensitive to ragweed and molds. If your child is experiencing sneezing, runny, stuffy nose, itchy throat, hives, swollen and itchy eyes, your child may be having seasonal allergies. Please consult with his/her physician for preferred treatment for symptom relief.
- If your child requires medication to be administered at school, a parental authorization and physician authorization forms are required. Both of these forms may be found on the NPS website under "departments", "health", "forms". Natick Public Schools medication policy requires that all medication must be in a pharmacy labeled container, and all medication MUST be transported by an adult.
- We recommend that all children receive the flu shot. They can get one at their physicians office by appointment. Also, Natick Public Schools will offer a family flu clinic at Ben-Hem on October 30th from 1--3 PM. Look for details via the virtual backpack. Please have the required paperwork completed before you come, in order to save time.

In the next newsletter we would like to share with you some of the things that we do as School Nurses throughout the school year. As always your questions are welcomed.

Thank--you your School Nurses,
Barbara Singer, MSN, RN
Denise Twiss, MS, RN



PTO UPDATES



GET INVOLVED

<http://www.benhempto.org/calendar>

Fall Fundraising Update

Dear Parents,

At the start of September, the PTO sent home a letter introducing the Support Your Kids campaign and kicking-off our fall fundraising initiatives. Our Ben-Hem community responded with such overwhelming support that we are pleased to announce that we exceeded all of our goals!

Support Your Kids Drive

Goal: \$6,500 - Achieved: Over \$9,000

Genevieve's Gift Wrap

Goal: \$3,000 - Achieved: Over \$3,000

Combined Community Participation

Goal: 65% - Achieved: 84%

We are extremely grateful to everyone for their contributions toward these goals, and are proud to belong to such an involved community.

Now that the major fall fundraising period is complete, the PTO will be shifting focus to ensure that the funds raised are put to good use and continue to improve the educational experience of the Ben-Hem students.

Already this year, the PTO has sponsored:

Family Events

Family Picnic
Monster Mash

Community Events

Bill's, Ziti's & CPK Nights

Cultural Arts Events

States of Matter (4th Grade)
Fireseed Arts (All School)

We would appreciate the feedback and suggestions of the parents and teachers in the Ben-Hem community as we continue to execute on the PTO plans for the 2013-2014 school year. At the Tuesday, November 5 PTO Meeting, we will be reviewing Grant applications and discussing upcoming programs. We hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Krissy Fernandes & Tracey Gondelman
PTO Co-Presidents



VOLUNTEER

<http://www.benhempto.org/volunteer>

Current Volunteer Opportunities:

Teacher Time Savers
Cafeteria Helpers
Morning Drop-off
Scholastic Book Fair
Holiday Fair



GIVE SUPPORT

<http://www.benhempto.org/give>

While the fall fundraising period is over, there are still many ways that you can give your support to Ben-Hem.

Gift Fundraisers

Square One Art

* Information and FREE stickers coming home soon! *

Points Programs:

Stop & Shop A+ Rewards

(Goal: 250, Achieved (10/29): 183 card registrations)

Amazon School Rewards

(Just start shopping at <http://amazon.benhempto.org>)

Box Tops for Education

Target Red Card

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Meet Kelly Guagenty! Kelly is a Ben-Hem mom and chairperson of the PTO's Restaurant/Event of the Month program.



Kelly Guagenty with daughters Cheryl and Macaela

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

A: We have two students at Ben-Hem. Cheryl is in Ms. O'Brien's 4th grade class, and Macaela is in Ms. Craig's 2nd grade class.

Q: How long have you lived in Natick?

A: We moved to Natick in 2008.

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

A: Technically, this is my first year volunteering for the PTO directly. However, I have volunteered for Ben-Hem in many other capacities throughout the years. I've been a room parent several times, chaperoned many field trips, attended dozens of school-related functions, and this will be my second year teaching Junior Achievement courses at the school.

Q: What prompted you to get involved?

A: I have had such wonderful experiences participating in all of the above things, so I decided this year to take the extra step and start helping out the PTO as well.

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

A: This year, I took on the role of Chairperson of the Restaurant Fundraisers for the PTO. So far, it's been a blast! We're really trying to spread the word that these events, although they are technically "fundraisers", are more about community building. Our goal is to encourage parents to get families together for these fundraisers. At both the Ziti's event on October 14th and the CPK event on October 22nd, we had large tables of Ben Hem families eating together and enjoying each other's company. It was so much fun!

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

A: We spend a lot of time at the ice rink and swimming pool (Macaela's activities), and riding stables, cheer gym, and art classes (Cheryl's activities).

I also work two part-time jobs outside the home. One is as an independent contractor for a small law firm in Newton (I've been a practicing attorney for ten years). The other (and more recent) job is as a substitute teacher for the Natick Schools.

Since we have such busy lives, truly my favorite thing to do is just spend time at home with Mike, the girls, and our beloved dog, Toby.

Q: What volunteer opportunities interest you the most?

A: I love to socialize! Any opportunity that gets me out in the community meeting new and old friends interests me the most.

I also care deeply about community service/charity work, as well as animal rights. I'm hoping to find ways to incorporate those interests into my involvement with the Ben-Hem PTO and Fourth Grade Planning Committee this year.

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

A: They love it!

Q: Anything else you want to share?

A: Looking forward to a fantastic year at Ben Hem!

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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.

Question of the Month: What do you remember about your favorite teacher growing up?

“Ms. Fisher was my 6th Grade teacher and she dressed up the classroom like the Coliseum in Rome. She put the desks in a circle and let the kids walk around on them.” – *Ms. Craig*

“Her name was Mrs. Boucher and she taught Kindergarten at Bugby School. She always had a smile on her face and she was really nice.” – *Ms. Fair*

“Ms. Dice was her High School music teacher. She was really nice and sang shows with her.” – *Mrs. Weaver*

“Mrs. Gibbons! She was very kind, never got upset, and gave us lots of hugs.” – *Ms. Simmons*

Ms. Craig (Second Grade Teacher)

Interviewed by James Balderson (2nd Grade)

Q: Do you like to travel?

A: Yes, last year I went to Costa Rica and this year I'm going to Thailand. I've also been to Ghana.

Q: What is your favorite bug?

A: The Leaf Ant.

Q: Do you like jelly?

A: Yes, but only grape and apple (apple especially this time of year).

Ms. Fair (Fourth Grade Teacher)

Interviewed by Emily Scharr (4th Grade)

Q: What is your favorite book?

A: Stuart Little. I just loved Stuart Little as a character.

Q: What do you expect from a fourth grader?

A: I expect fourth graders to come to school prepared every day with a great attitude and ready to learn.

Q: What are your favorite animals?

A: Dolphins and dogs. I think it would be really cool to go swimming with dolphins. Dogs are so cute and cuddly.

Mrs. Weaver (Music Teacher)

Interviewed by Sammy Scharr (4th Grade)

Q: How long have you been teaching at Ben-Hem?

A: 11 years.

Q: What is your favorite instrument?

A: Piano and singing.

Q: What advice would you give about music?

A: Keep working at it. Don't give up.

Ms. Simmons (First Grade Teacher)

Interviewed by Macaela Guagenty (2nd Grade)

Q: What is your favorite part about being a teacher?

A: I love meeting lots of new friends and seeing them learn and grow.

Q: What was it like to be a cheerleader at Boston College?

A: It was super fun! We got to travel a lot. Performing in front of all those people was nerve-wracking, but fun. I loved my team!

Q: What is your favorite food?

A: Homemade pizza.

KID'S CORNER

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK: 10 things are different between the two pictures below. Find them all!!

