

Homeschoolers get three R's and then some

Enterprise-based group gives kids a solid education

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic — and a whole lot more — are a part of the County Christian LiberSchola Community's homeschool program.

"In most cases parents send their kids to school," said Michael Caine, community coordinator for the program. "In our case, parents accompany them."

'Celebration' Tuesdays

That goes for the approximately 50 students up through the 11th grade who homeschool four days a week and then gather Tuesdays at Enterprise Christian Church to share what they've been doing.

"Tuesday's almost a celebration, a community day," Caine said. "It's the day students bring what they've been working on all week. For us, the whole scheme is you work hard all week to be prepared for Tuesday."

He said the program isn't so much of a school in the formal sense.

"We're more of a group of homeschoolers, not really a school," he said.

During the four days a week the kids are homeschooling, they take part in the usual bevy of academic coursework found in most schools. They also are able to join in Wallowa County school athletic programs and other community offerings.

Although there is no formal athletic training in the program, families make up for that.

"Our families are hyperactive in the sports community," he said. "We have a huge number of cross-country runners, several track runners and lots of soccer players."

There's also what Caine calls "para-educational programs."

"We have some really high participation rates in Wallowology programs and Josephy Center programs," he said, as well as an education course in nature. Participating in community theater and performing arts also are part of the curriculum.

Those programs are something unique to Wallowa County, as the families here are able to take advantage of many of the programs and resources in the community.



Michael Caine/Contributed Photo

Students in Bobbi Thomson's sewing class work with volunteers from the Wallowa Mountain Quilter's Guild and Enterprise Christian Church during County Christian LiberSchola Community's homeschool program.

Sewing

One such resource is volunteers from the Wallowa Mountain Quilter's Guild and Enterprise Christian Church involved in sewing and quilting. They bring their sewing machines on Tuesdays and teach a group of about nine 6- to 8-year-olds. Right now, they're working on quilt squares for quilts — to be provided both locally and internationally.

"We start out with the basics. We teach them about the sewing machine, we teach them how to sew on buttons. They made a bookmark, they've made 'bowl cozys' (to place a hot bowl of soup in)," said Bobbi Thomson, a guild member who is in her third year teaching the class. "Now we're advancing onto quilt blocks for an expectant mother and the Ukraine through the Prairie Creek Quilt Shop."

Thomson said the 10.5-inch quilt blocks will be either assembled into quilts by the quilt shop or by another organization and ultimately shipped to Ukraine.

"They're trying to make as many personal quilts as possible to send to Ukraine," she said.

Thomson said the five boys and four girls enjoy what they're doing.

"They're all in favor of this," she said. "When we're done with that project, we're going to do a Mother's Day project."

Caine is pleased that the boys are some of the biggest fans of the sewing class.



Michael Caine/Contributed Photo

Middle-school students work on their English grammar in Carrie Kilner's class during "celebration" Tuesday of the County Christian LiberSchola Community's homeschool program.

"I think it's very true that our boys are some of the most enthusiastic students in our sewing class," he said.

And the projects bring out some of the best in the kids, as they're more into making things for others than themselves.

"They're very generous," Thomson said. "They want to make things for other people."

Thomson said she believes that in our disposable society, teaching the craft of sewing is something that needs to be encouraged.

"It's becoming a lost art," she said. "We need to encourage kids to know how to sew."

Sound scholarship

With the oldest student in the program in 11th grade, the issue of high school graduation won't be coming up for another

year. As for a diploma, that's more of something the family will deal with in conjunction with the program.

"When it comes to a diploma, the homeschool family is responsible," Caine said. "A diploma is a cooperative engagement between the family and our school group."

He said the state doesn't require any "state stamp of approval that goes on homeschoolers' transcript," although standardized tests are required every two years.

College-bound students are urged to prepare for the SAT test that is used as a benchmark to prepare for college.

"A good homeschool endeavor prepares a student in so many ways," Caine said. "It'll prepare a student to be a good father or mother or electrician or plumber or college student or whatever."

He said the homeschoolers learn in some of the most advanced educational methods.

"Some of our education focuses on the Socratic method, which pro-

voles students to speak intelligently, to present intelligently on subjects they've mastered," Caine said. "The reason that's essential is that in so many ways, we prepare our students to become good doctoral students, and to speak well to it."

According to the Stanford University website, the Socratic method aims not to strike fear in the hearts of students so that they come prepared to class, but to strike fear in the hearts of students that they either cannot articulate clearly the values that guide their lives, or that their values and beliefs do not withstand scrutiny.

"A lot of our education does aim for the highest educational goals," Caine said. He said homeschooling yields some positive results.

"Colleges tend to like homeschoolers a lot," he said. "They have a certain sense of this world that others don't."

Program's not new

Caine said the LiberSchola program has been going about nine years. Although he is not a credentialed teacher, he doesn't discount the value of postsecondary degrees.

"I know a lot of people work very hard to get those degrees and I'm sure they're very valuable," he said. But his drive is from his passion for helping kids learn.

"I do have a passion for education and have taught at the college level," he said.

And that's true of the other parents of homeschoolers.

"We just want to be a more integral part of our kids' education and to shepherd our children," Caine said. "We do feel that their academics is just one part of shepherding them."

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