

Banks Christian Academy: Small School, Big Heart

By Scott Laird

Banks Christian Academy (BCA) is a small, private, non-denominational Christian school that is offering quality education in a small setting. It also offers a staff with a positive attitude and great resources for a small private school.

BCA isn't in Banks, exactly. It is located in Buxton, a few miles up the road from Banks, and on the way to Vernonia. Vernonia's Voice was recently invited to visit the school and meet first-year principal, Odessa Falcon.

Falcon is a hometown girl, who grew up in Buxton, and has lived in the area all her life. She is in her fourth year at BCA, having spent the previous three years teaching third grade, sixth and seventh grades, and the last year, seventh and eighth grades. This year she has taken over as principal, replacing a predecessor who was there for the last twenty-four years. Falcon is humble about her expectations.

"I just want to continue the vision of the people that founded the school," she said during our tour of the facility. "I just want to continue the next chapter in our story. And be the best we can be."

Just because BCA is smaller than other local public schools doesn't mean students get short-changed on their educational opportunities. In fact, some might argue that a smaller-sized school provides more opportunities.

With ninety-one students in pre-school through ninth grade classes, BCA offers small classes, individual instruction, a family atmosphere, and a principal who knows every student by name.

BCA is a non-denominational school, but one that includes religion in all parts of learning. Bible study and history are often combined to give students a well-rounded and comprehensive view. Families are not required to attend church, but the school does encourage parental involvement.

More importantly, Falcon says the school focuses on providing, "... the best education possible, and teaching life skills and personal responsibility— being responsible for our personal actions." Falcon said she felt it was important for students to learn about being organized and punctual, and turning assignments in on time, as ways of teaching responsibility to students.

"We are able to teach to the student's level. If a student is excelling in a subject, we don't hold them back. If a student is struggling with something, we can give them extra attention."



On the day we visited, November 10, the school was celebrating Veterans Day with an honorary assembly. Pete Edwards, a ninety-year-old veteran of Pearl Harbor, who lives in Banks, patiently answered questions from the students and talked about his experiences in the US Navy. Later, we looked at bulletin boards that commemorate the students bi-annual ten-day trip to Washington DC and Philadelphia, a highlight for students and teachers alike.

During the tour of the school, we saw colorful classrooms loaded with learning materials, interactive learning, a well-stocked library that is run by an enthusiastic volunteer, and Falcon's pride and joy, the new computer lab, with eighteen work stations. The lab is in a separate building that was completely renovated by volunteers— new ceilings, walls and floors, which has brought the school into the twenty-first century.

Falcon says she has enjoyed the administrative side of working at the school this year. "I am very busy all the time," she said. "And I like getting to know all the kids, not just my class." She is obviously making quite an impression on her students, as she is greeted by enthusiastic hugs and smiles in all the rooms we visit on our tour.

BCA holds numerous events and fundraisers, and invites the community to attend. Upcoming: an annual Christmas sing-a-long before the students are released for Christmas break, this year on December 19 at 2:00 PM. There will be cookies and punch served.

The public is also invited to attend the annual Student Showcase in the spring. This is a time where students display their artwork, history reports that are a year in the making, and Science Fair or Inventors Fair projects. It is a great event where you can see the students' work and accomplishments.

BCA is registered with the state of Oregon and does testing every two years to ensure students are keeping up with the Federal and State guidelines. This last spring, the seventh and eighth graders tested at post high school levels.

Falcon concluded our visit with these inspiring words, "I love working here at BCA with our awesome staff, parents and students!" Sounds like a great place, and a great attitude.



Pete Edwards, a ninety year old veteran of Pearl Harbor addressed the students

Vernonia Hands-on Art Variety Show a Success

The fourth annual Hands-on Art variety show provided a highly enjoyable evening that showcased local talent. This year's show began with a scene from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" performed by four budding thespians, Hailey Jole, Maria Pelster, Caleb Hardy, and Abraham Hardy; Sierra Jole provided the narra-



Jake Brock on guitar



Grace Semerjian performs a gypsy dance

tion. Petra Johnson and Maggie Hatt performed Highland and Irish dances, and Grace Semerjian presented Flamenco and Gypsy dances with great style. The Scott Family entertained with tin whistle and guitar. The Vernonia Community Orchestra, Strings on Fire, led by Caleb Hardy, and the Hands-on Art Recorder players, led by Rachel Hardy, provided a delightful range of musical styles. Jake Brock, Kim Scott, Danyell Freeman, and Tom Hardy sang solos, and the Vernonia Community Singers closed the show with three lively numbers. Vernonia's mayor, Sally Harrison, was once again the Mistress of Ceremonies.

At the suggestion of one of the performers, this year the audience members were given ballots to vote for their favorite act. The "People's Choice Award" goes to ten year old Grace Semerjian for her engaging Gypsy dance.

This year's show raised cash and canned goods for Vernonia Cares Holiday Food Drive and the Vernonia Grange.



Strings on Fire, and the Hands-on Art Recorder players



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