



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer
An assortment of building materials are available for youths at Whitworth’s first stem night.

STEM: Brings family and learning together

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Fourth-grader Zayne Read with his father, Jeremy Read, paused at one of the tables filled with materials.

They wanted to make Zayne's cross bow-like design shoot the "arrow" in a more predictable manner.

"OK, we are going to do a handle this time buddy," Jeremy Read told his son, showing Zayne how the new and improved bow would work.

Zayne nodded, listening to his father describe how it should shoot after the fix.

When asked what he liked about the project, Zayne didn't mince words: "The main thing is spending time with my dad — without my sister."

Read seemed equally appreciative of the event, which was geared toward family involvement.

"I think it's kind of cool," Read said. "I honestly think this is something they should have done a long time ago."

As and the father-and-son team discovered, the difference between a traditional science class versus stem projects is there isn't necessarily one right answer — and failure is acceptable as long as kids continue to work out the problem.

"Unfortunately, I think we've kind of drilled that out of them in public school," Vessell said. "You can fail at something and it's still an opportunity. We learn a lot from it."

She's found teaching students concepts, such as those common in math classes, is more effective in the midst of a fun hands-on project. Vessell said the schools that have adopted the practice are seeing proof in assessments.

"Schools that use project-based learning or stem education, they've actually found that their test scores increase, and not decrease," Vessell said. "A lot of times you are teaching less content, but more application."

In other words, the age-old question, "How will I use this in real life?" is answered.

Developing skills for that "real life" after graduation is the idea behind bringing stem education to Whitworth. LaCreole Middle School has a stem and robotics program, while Dallas High School is developing a CTE program.

"We really want to start feeding that interest and that fire at the younger grade levels so that we can continue to feed into those programs," Geddes said. "As we expand them, it helps prepare the students for college and career."

Vessell sees what the district is developing as positive for both students and the community in general.

"In some districts, stem education has led to more career and technical education pathways. That's something that the business community has support out there for," Vessell said, noting grants are available for those programs as well.

"Kids can get jobs when they come out of school," she added. "I think it's a hopeful direction."

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Drennen takes reins at Oakdale Heights

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — The Dallas School Board has named Maria Drennen as Oakdale Heights Elementary School principal.

Now a counselor in the McMinnville School District, Drennen will replace Caleb Harris, who will take the principal post at Whitworth Elementary School starting next school year.

Drennen has 12 years of experience in education, three as a teacher and nine at a counselor.

She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in counseling and her administrative license.

Dallas Superintendent Michelle Johnstone said Drennen met all the requirements Oakdale's staff was looking for in its next principal. She recommended the board select Drennen Monday during a special meeting, which it did in a unanimous vote.

"We are very excited to be offering her the position," Johnstone said.

Drennen was among more than 35 candidates who applied for the post. She said the size of the school and community, as well as involvement of families in the school, made the job attractive.

Drennen will be a first-year principal, but has had her administrative license for three years. In that time,

she's served as a fill in for the principal or vice principal, though officially she is a counselor.

"I have lots and lots of experience in the role, but not an official title," she said.

She said she will meet with Oakdale Heights staff this week and will visiting the school often in June to begin the transition.

"I'm all in," Drennen said. "I'm ready to join the community. I will be out and about in the community and looking forward to meeting everyone."

Current Whitworth Principal Darlene Geddes will be seeking opportunities in secondary education elsewhere, Johnstone said.

Prize: Maurice encourages trying, failing

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Having spent a lifetime learning and understanding the struggles of undergraduate students, Maurice decided to do something to help.

His wife Delores died in 2007, leaving him alone with their estate.

He decided to sell their extensive art collection — including Maurice originals — and the house to benefit undergraduate students.

"I've outlived virtually everyone in the family except for nephews and nieces, and I decided I'd give some money to the University of Illinois Chicago to challenge undergraduates," Maurice said. "I didn't have a plan, but wanted to implement something for freshmen and sophomores. They told me no, I should give the money for graduates and research."

It took Maurice three years to establish the program in Chicago.

His experience at Western Oregon University was very different. He met the president John Minnahan and told him about the prize.

"Minnahan said he would like to talk to me about it, because it sounded

like something different," Maurice recalled.

The Alfred Maurice Prize is in its fourth year at Western.

Officials in Chicago told Maurice he was wasting his money, "They don't know anything," Maurice recalled being told about undergrads.

"So I worked out a program in which there would be a challenge to the undergraduates to do something outside of classes that they really, sincerely wanted to do," he said. "Things for their careers or whatever, and see what they can do."

Maurice has a passion and understanding for undergraduates.

"I think that they're very misused and neglected," he said. "At every college university, they're used as fodder for their graduate programs. It's cheap to hire them to teach, also they have this myth that students who are the first ones in their family to go to college and who are poor don't know anything."

Undergraduate students decide to participate in October and have until May to work on their project.

The winner receives a \$5,000 prize — which differs from a scholarship be-

cause students may spend the money however they wish.

"They present what they've learned," said Daryl Thomas, chairwoman of the Maurice Prize committee. "The committee picks a winner based on what the project was, actually, but mostly on how much the person learned."

Whether or not the student "solves" the problem or is successful at achieving a result is irrelevant.

"That's what I love about this prize," Thomas said. "It just sparks more community involvement. You don't have to do the project perfectly; what did you learn, if you kept going. You don't even have to succeed with this goal. This is just exciting to see what the students come up with."

Instead of being results-based, the prize is learning based, Maurice said.

"They have to award the prize to the students or student who has learned the most," he said. "When I told (school officials at Chicago) that, their response was, 'You realize someone could fail and win?'"

Past projects include two Latino women who set up a networking program with the high school seniors and students from WOU.

"It was a pretty complex thing to get the members of this network to set goals for themselves," Maurice said.

"Then last year, a young man from Hawaii decided that there was a lot of food being wasted here. He decided he would work out something that could make use of the food that was being thrown out."

Thomas said that student learned that food cannot just be given away, even if it hasn't been touched. Determined to make a difference and decrease the 400 pounds of food thrown away in Western cafeterias, the student found that sandwiches, cookies and yogurts could be donated to Hungry Like the Wolf, Western's food bank.

"He wouldn't take no for an answer," Thomas said. "He kept banging away and asking things until he found out what food could be given away."

Projects this year include examining the increase in sexually transmitted infections; looking at what WOU's campus is doing to prevent mass shootings; and a believe survivors campaign.

The winner will present his or her project at the Academic Showcase at WOU on May 26.

MAY 2016

MONMOUTH AREA COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

May 6 — **Diamond Back concert at the Redgate Vineyard Fieldhouse.** 6 - 9 pm Redgate Vineyard welcomes local rockin' band, Diamondback! Join us as we sip on Redgate Wines, munch on pizzas made with local Ovenbird Bakery crust or bring a picnic. \$10 cover charge. 8175 Buena Vista Road, Independence. Visit the website for full schedule. redgatevineyard.com

May 6 & 7 — **Polk County Master Gardener 26th Annual Plant Sale.** Friday and Saturday May 6th & 7th, 9 am – 4 pm, FREE ADMISSION •Odd & unusual plants •Our Ever Popular country store •Herbs & Native plants •Vegetables •Perennials & annuals •Trees and shrubs •Hanging baskets & houseplants •Vendor booths •Master Gardener table to answer your gardening questions Located At the Polk County Fairgrounds in Building "C" — we'll have signs to show you the way! 520 S Pacific Highway W (Hwy 99 W), Rickreall. For information call 503-623-8395

May 7 — **Friends Annual Spring Book Sale** features a variety of books for all ages. 9 am to 3 pm. A special section contains gently read and nearly new books for bargain prices. Proceeds are used to provide programs for youth and adults all year. Monmouth Public Library 168 Ecols Street, Monmouth

May 11 — **Chamber May Forum** – Noon to 1 pm Topic: 2016 State Legislative Session Recap and House District 20 Update. Location: Independence Public Library (175 Monmouth Street, Independence) Join us in May as we welcome State Representative Paul Evans who will provide an overview of the recent legislative session and explain how outcomes will impact our community, as well as look towards the November ballot and potential measures effecting businesses. \$11.00 boxed lunch from Crush Wine Bar Includes wrap, chips, dessert and bottled water. Fee incurred unless cancelation received via email to micc@minetfiber.com by noon 5/10/16.

May 17 — **Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce PEP Talks:** Promoting with a Purpose On Paper Noon to 1:30 pm. Overview: •Learn top marketing tools •Review free/low cost tools •Understand do's and don'ts. Presented by: Robert Sudeith, Oregon Lithoprint. Location: Henry Hill Education Support Center, 750 S 5th Street, Independence. Register by noon Monday, May 16.The PEP Talks Series, Promote Enterprising Performance, is designed to provide information, tips, best practices, and resources on various topics to help strengthen businesses and organizations in our community. MI Chamber members and non-members are invited to attend any or all of the series led by local leaders in their respective fields of expertise. The 2016 Spring Series includes three different workshops, one per month April through June. Each workshop will be held from 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM and include lunch for participants. Cost per workshop is \$15 for MI Chamber members and \$20 for non-members.

May 21 — **DISCOVER MI TOWN** 12 pm to 5 pm. Eat, Drink, Shop! Downtown Independence & Downtown Monmouth Shuttle service provided.(drop off/pick up at Riverview Park and Main Street Park) Tickets: \$10 pre-sale by 5/20/16; \$15 day of the event •Pre-sale tickets may be purchased online (click "Register Now" above) or at participating businesses/organizations •Tickets may be purchased the day of the event at the registration table located at the Monmouth-Independence Family YMCA Presented by the Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center, Discover MI Town is an opportunity for visitors and locals alike to explore the beautiful downtown areas of our community and showcase our wonderful local restaurants, stores, and organizations. Registration table at MI YMCA 301 Main Street S. Independence.

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