

Second Class of Graduates Celebrate

Nine students commence to high school

Nine young ladies of the Sojourner Truth class received their diplomas at Grace Academy's second commencement ceremony on Wednesday, June 11, 2014. Sojourner Truth class members were the first students to attend all four years at Grace Academy, the intended design of the middle school program. Three students will attend East Catholic High School, two will attend Mercy High School in Middletown, and one will attend Northwest Catholic. All three high schools provided generous financial aid to these six students, including Sabrina Williams, the class's keynote speaker, who will attend East Catholic on a full scholarship. Three other students will attend Connecticut River Academy and the Pathways Academy of Technology and Design, which are both magnet schools in the Hartford region.

In her graduation speech, Sabrina Williams looked at her classmates and told them to remember to always study hard and do their best, because that's what gets you far in life. "It's not money, not the way you dress, or boys, or fancy cars that will make you successful, it's education - education is the key, and the question is: what will you unlock with it?"

"When these students stepped through Grace's front door back in 2010, they began a unique journey," says Matt Fitzsimons, Head of School. They interacted with students born in places like Peru, Thailand and Puerto Rico. To succeed they were asked to demonstrate academic motivation, make a personal commitment to the extended-day and full-week program, and successfully complete summer school. "You have discovered the joy and vitality of a holistic education and how that can unlock multiple doors for you," said Fitzsimons. "We want you to have opportunities where you can venture down roads that will deepen your faith in God, stretch your athletic abilities, explore the worlds of literature, the sciences, technology and the arts."

The nine graduates are a smart, funny, athletic, musical, artistic and energetic group. "They really bonded into a true sisterhood looking out for one another," says Colleen Krmpotich, eighth grade advisor and social studies teacher. More importantly, they served as mentors and big sisters to the 7th, 6th, and, most importantly, the new 5th grade students.



The Class of 2014 celebrates their graduation!

Academically they were challenged at every level and in every class. They learned how to write research papers stating a thesis and supporting a point of view, recite poetry, solve equations, perform science experiments, and use technology to assist in learning and communications. They learned how to prepare and take standardized tests and interview effectively. "But beyond the classroom this group was exposed to opportunities they never had before," says curriculum director Lindsey McPhee. "They learned how to sing, play instruments, perform in front of audiences, play team sports, and participate in community service."

Sojourner Truth class graduates fully embraced the school's mission of serving others, participating in projects such as wreath making at Christmas for Mercy Housing on Main Street, building bears for children with volunteers from PricewaterhouseCoopers, baking food for FoodShare and participating in the Walk Against Hunger, running for life in the ING marathon's student event, serving meals at St. Patrick - St. Anthony, and much more.

Graduation Day Highlights

During the graduation ceremony, Lisa Caraballo read “Our Greatest Fear” by Marianne Williamson. “We chose this as a class because it had a great message,” said Caraballo. “Our greatest fear” is not that we are inadequate, but that we are powerful beyond measure.

Graduates Laura Cordero, Lesly Davila, Kierrah Harris, Marilyn Vazquez and Marisol Vazquez acknowledged very special people at Grace Academy who supported, encouraged and were instrumental in helping them achieve their goals. Julitza Garcia introduced the graduation speaker, Thea Montañez, a vice chair of the Grace Academy Board. “Eat the world!” Montañez proclaimed, “You can do and be anything you want. You are capable of changing the world but must remember to give back to your community.”

WHERE THEY ARE HEADED NOW

Natalia Allen, East Hartford	East Catholic High School
Laura Cordero, Hartford	CT River Academy
Lisa Caraballo, Hartford	Pathways Academy of Technology and Design
Lesly Davila, Hartford	CT River Academy
Julitza Garcia, Hartford	Northwest Catholic High School
Kierrah Harris, Hartford	East Catholic High School
Marilyn Vazquez, Hartford	Mercy High School
Marisol Vazquez, Hartford	Mercy High School
Sabrina Williams, Hartford	East Catholic High School (full scholarship)



Service to and from Others



Naomi Arroyo at one of seven sewing machines makes a dress for a girl in Haiti.

Dresses for Haiti

Among the many “clubs” offered to students, one of the most inspiring this year came from the Sewing Club, led by Renee Soderberg, the wife of Adam Soderberg, pastor of South Church. To get the students warmed up for sewing, Renee had club participants make simple dresses for girls from Haiti. When the first set of dresses were completed, the students unanimously voted to make as many dresses as possible for Haitian girls in need.



Tianna Parnther, Ashanti Richards, Janelle Darkwah and Heavyhn Kimber performing at the Soroptimists fundraising event.

Soroptimist Sweethearts

Soroptimists International of Farmington Valley, CT embraced the mission of Grace Academy even prior to the school’s opening in 2010. Since that time, dozens of Soroptimist members have volunteered their time and talent to the school in such ways as: leading the Cooking Club (the most popular club!), teaching etiquette, leading Saturday field trips on square dancing and martial arts, photographing students for the yearbooks, tutoring, recruiting, counselling and more. On Saturday evening, March 8, the Soroptimists invited Grace Academy students to perform at their second major fundraising event, held at the Avon Old Farms Hotel. Proceeds from the event benefitted Grace Academy, the Prudence Crandall Center in New Britain and other Soroptimists causes benefitting women and girls.

Helping the Hungry

The students' first Saturday field trip in September of 2013 was a hunger awareness workshop led by staff from FoodShare with assistance from Trinity College students. On May 4, Grace Academy students and teachers joined FoodShare again by participating in the organization's 31st Walk Against Hunger. FoodShare provides emergency food assistance to over 128,000 people, including 50,000 children, from the greater Hartford region each year. The FoodShare Walk Against Hunger is one of their major fundraising events which raised \$650,000, with Grace students doing their small part.



Walk for Hunger: Grace girls participate in the annual FoodShare Walk Against Hunger.

HARC Volunteering, Spring 2014

Seventh and eighth grade students volunteered to help disabled children at HARC, a nonprofit that helps people with intellectual disabilities and their families. On two Saturdays, Grace students worked with children suffering from multiple disabilities and complex medical conditions. HARC's Saturday program, "Camp Bulova," gives the child a day of fun while staff



HARC: Kyoee Paw guides a HARC student through a fun activity on a Saturday morning.

and volunteers engage the children with music and motor training, arts and crafts and exercise and occupational therapy. "It is fabulous to be able to see Grace students emerge as leaders through service with people of the Hartford community and to appreciate people's differences and understand the challenges that some participates of the HARC program have." says teacher Olivia Belofsky. Students were asked to return for the 2014-15 year.

PwC Volunteer Day, May 22, 2014

Employees from PricewaterhouseCoopers made their third annual visit to Grace Academy to help complete a list of projects that enhance the quality of the school. Projects included: painting the development office, organizing the storage closets and library, cleaning the school vans, planting flowers, and supplying materials for a Build a Bear service project. Grace students were then able to make stuffed teddy bears for children in need.



Jus Star and Thalia Ortiz display their Build a Bears for their community service project lead by employees of PwC.

Junior League: Etiquette and Gardening

The Hartford Junior League visited Grace Academy in May to explain the value of mealtime etiquette. Sonya Jelks, an active Junior League volunteer at GA, led a lunchtime activity, helping students learn how to greet guests, make conversation during a 4-course meal, sit properly and, no surprise, how to use all the different utensils and eat properly! Two weeks later, a dozen Junior League volunteers returned on a Saturday to teach students about healthy and delicious garden grown meals, they assisted with planting vegetables and herbs in the school's raised garden beds.



Junior League: Graciela Santos, Ester Paw and Nary Oo having fun with seeds they plan to grow at home, thanks to the Junior League of Hartford who led a gardening and nutrition field trip.

Poetry Month Celebrates Third Year at Grace

Back in March of 2012, Sarah Lahr Fitzsimons suggested that the school invite friends to the daily Circle of Peace and Respect to read a poem to students in celebration of National Poetry Month. Not knowing what to expect, nor who would accept the invitations, the Poetry Month experience has turned into a favorite for guests and students. In 2012, readers such as Mayor Pedro Segarra, The Hartford's CEO Liam McGee, State Rep. Matthew Ritter, Community Solutions founder Roseanne Haggerty, and Hartford Library President and School Board Chair Matthew Poland graciously visited the school to share a favorite poem. This

year, students heard from: Metro Hartford Alliance President Oz Griebel, First Lady Cathy Malloy, United Way CEO Susan Dunn, community volunteer Lori McGee, Santander Bank executive Alvaro Garcia, Aetna executive Jean LaTorre, PR executives Gene Sheehan and Duby McDowell, and others. Guests are always asked to engage the students in their personal reflections on their poem's meaning, and teachers and guests often marvel at the pearls of wisdom that are released from the student's young hearts and minds. At the conclusion of the series, Grace Academy compiles all the poems, binds them and sends them to the guests as a gift.



First Lady Cathy Malloy.



Community volunteer Lori McGee.



Metro Hartford Alliance Chair Oz Griebel.



Aetna's Chief Investment Officer, Jean LaTorre.



United Way's President and CEO, Susan Dunn.

Grace Happenings

Spring Showcase, May 29, 2014

Grace Academy students showed off their hard work and talents in the visual and performing arts semi-annual showcase. The spring showcase included creative and inspiring artwork from each class (under the direction of art teacher Jacqueline Dunsworth) as well as projects and essays from the history fair and earth science class. Musical performances included piano solos and a keyboard contest, where four students wrote essays about their passion for music and performed a short piece to compete for a donated keyboard. A unique, student written play was performed by the Drama Club, and students memorized and recited bilingual poetry in honor of National Poetry Month. The showcase ended with collaborative chamber performances by Grace Academy guitarists, orchestra, band and choir. The orchestra performed “Eleanor Rigby” by the Beatles and the choir performed “Wake Me Up” by Avicii, accompanied by the guitarists. The entire school performed “Hey Jude” by the Beatles as the grand finale, together in harmony!



Showcase: The band and choir perform their finale, “Hey Jude”, at the spring showcase.

History Fair

Marian Anderson (7th grade) and Sojourner Truth (8th grade) students presented long term research projects at the second annual History Fair, organized by social studies teacher Colleen Krmpotich. Over the course of three months, students set aside time in class and in Study Hall to research an assigned human rights topic. Students had to know the topic thoroughly and were required to create a three-panel display board. Topics included: Susan B. Anthony, one child policy in China, Japanese Internment Camps, Little Rock Nine, the Irish Famine, Salem witch trials, and Apartheid and Nelson Mandela. Ms. Krmpotich recruits educators, board members and others to serve as judges who use a detailed rubric to evaluate the projects. The judges were impressed by the depth of research, the mastery of topics, and the presentation skills of our students.



History Fair: Laura Cordero and Kierrah Harris in front of their “Women’s Dress in Iran before and after the Iranian Revolution” History Fair project.

Students Immerse Themselves into the Medical Profession at CESI

How do you stabilize an injured person with smoke from the accident billowing about you and sirens blaring in your ear? That’s what GA students had to try to do at a Hartford Hospital program. The hospital is a hub for medical training and its Center for Education, Simulation and Invention features exact replicas of an operating room, intensive care unit, delivery room and trauma room. Students were guided by medical instructors in ways to use sophisticated operating equipment for surgical procedures. Each student had the opportunity to use da Vinci robots and robotic simulators that mimicked real patients and real medical situations. CESI is designed to train physicians and nurses and our students were able to experience exactly what it might be like to be a doctor or nurse.



CESI: Kierrah Harris and Natalia Allen resuscitate a CESI ‘patient’ with a trainer from Hartford Hospital.

Soccer Team Joins Hartford Middle School League

After a 3-2 fall season led by 6th grade standout midfielder Mu Kue Paw (4 goals, 2 assists) and her sister, 7th grade goalie Kyoe Paw (25 saves), the Grace girls varsity soccer team has been invited into the Hartford Middle School Soccer League. The league plays games each Tuesday and Thursday in the fall and finishes with a playoff. The schedule will be posted on the GA website in September. “They are really gifted players that work so hard – it will be great for them to play in their home city and strive toward making the playoffs,” said Bryan Cote, head coach and athletic director. “Most of them have never played on a team so this is an important opportunity – I’ve told each one of them that if they hustle and can handle the ball, no matter what the sport, they can make any team they ever try out for.”



Soccer Cote: Coach Cote explains strategy at half-time.

Marge Morrissey

Marge Morrissey has dedicated her time, talent and treasure to a range of organizations that support Hartford's cultural, educational and social opportunities. In addition to her position on the Board of Directors and as Chair of Grace Academy's Development/Resources Committee, she is a board member of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Greater Hartford Arts Council, Hartford Art School, Riverfront Recapture, Hartford Stage, Connecticut Science Center and is an active voice on issues affecting the City of Hartford. Marge was one of the first supporters of Grace Academy five years ago, when the school was just an idea. She is a role model for women who can play "an important part in the greater Hartford community."

Marge Morrissey is also a *Guiding Star Sponsor* for students here at Grace. In 2011, Marge was honored by the Aurora Foundation as the Woman Philanthropist of the Year. "Marge Morrissey is one of those rare individuals with this modification that any organization would be honored to have involved. She is fully immersed in Grace Academy at the highest level, and also loves to help the school in the smallest ways. Marge has collected tennis balls for the students' desks and chair legs, organized donor plaques, gotten her hands dirty (literally) with students in the Garden Club, and handled a multitude of tasks for the annual Benefit at The Bushnell," says Head of School,

Matt Fitzsimons. "Her sharp wit and sense of humor makes her a pleasure to work with as she always brings joy to the task at hand. Her sunny humor reminds us that the work of educating the underserved girls of Hartford is soul enriching and she keeps all of us forward thinking each and every day. She is a person of integrity who operates from a clear sense of her values and her commitment to the arts, sciences, education and the City of Hartford. We are blessed by her presence."



When Marge Morrissey accepted the responsibility of Chair of the Development Committee, she renamed the committee "Development and Resources" Committee. Over the past five years, Marge has emphasized and helped attract donations of volunteer time, in-kind gifts, and alliances with other non-profits. The donations of valuable resources – in addition to monetary donations – have helped sustain Grace Academy. "Marge Morrissey is passionate about rebuilding the Hartford community and through her work she is creating a generation of transformational leaders," says Sarah Fitzsimons.

Natalie Hubert

Natalie Hubert received her Bachelor of Science from LeMoyne College in Syracuse, NY and her Master's degree from Western Connecticut State University. She is a certified teacher in Elementary Education as well as Special Education. Natalie's experiences include teaching eight years in public school and four years at a private school in Connecticut. Natalie teaches fifth grade math and will add fifth grade science next year. She started at Grace Academy in 2012-13 as a math tutor and led a Math Lab class. She led a Math Lab class this past year and was also the school's NWEA Measures of Academic Progress coordinator (the on-line assessment GA gives to students three times per year). Natalie is a tremendous resource to the AmeriCorps teachers. She and her husband, Keith, are the proud parents of three children.

How did you hear about Grace Academy and why did you decide to work here?

I first learned about Grace Academy when I met Lindsey McPhee at a PricewaterhouseCoopers fundraising event. I started here as a volunteer, tutoring students in math.

Teaching has always been a passion of mine, so it was a natural fit for me to teach at Grace. After my two years here I know our mission and philosophy truly make a difference in our students' lives.

What do you teach and what other roles do you play at GA?

This past school year I was thrilled to teach math to our fifth grade, Anne Frank, class and to provide Math intervention classes for students who need a bit more differentiation in math. I also helped coordinate our student testing program.

I am excited to add fifth grade science class to my responsibilities in the Fall. It is a privilege to work alongside our AmeriCorps teachers and spend my mornings teaching our fifth graders.

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What have you gained from your experience at Grace Academy so far?

I have always been passionate about education and teaching. My flexible schedule at Grace Academy allows me to do what I love and also be the mom that I want to be to my three children. My two years at Grace Academy have reminded me how important perseverance is and has renewed my faith in education. It is an overwhelming feeling to be able to provide our Hartford students with hope and a renewed outlook on education. I am thankful every day for the opportunity to make a difference at GA.

What do you enjoy most about Grace Academy?

The thing I enjoy most about GA is working with our students and teachers. I learn something new every day and love getting to know about our students and their families. My relationships with our teachers help me to reflect on who I am as a teacher and how I can be a better teacher in the classroom.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Mary McGowan

Mary is a native of West Hartford. She attended Hall High School, Salve Regina University and graduated from University of Hartford. Mary has two Master degrees, one in special education and one in counseling. She is one of eight children, all of whom do remarkable work for the communities they are involved in. In addition to her volunteer work at Grace Academy, Mary volunteers at soup kitchens, making sandwiches at St. Mark's in West Hartford, and St. Patrick, St. Anthony's in Hartford, and she makes dinners for a woman's shelter in Hartford. She is a room parent at Duffy Elementary School and coordinates the school yearbook there. To maintain her busy lifestyle, she runs three miles each day and has run marathons in London, Paris, Boston and Vermont. Mary is also an excellent baker, and she and her sister, Betsy, owned a business making chocolate chip cookies in Ireland. Mary is married to Tom McGowan. They have five children, two dogs, a cat, two rabbits, and a bearded dragon. Mary has an enormous heart and is very generous with her time.

How did you first learn about Grace Academy?

I first learned about Grace Academy from a friend and then found myself going by it each week when dropping off Whole Foods donations to South Park Inn, just down the street. I thought a school named Grace Academy has got to be a very special place!

How have you helped GA?

I hope I have helped! Before starting a family, I was a school guidance counselor and so I have enjoyed meeting with girls, both in groups and one on one, providing a listening ear, support and guidance, and hopefully serving as a mentor as well.

What motivates you to serve organizations as a volunteer?

I have always felt the importance of giving back to the community and helping whenever I can. My children are all in school now, and I wanted to use my available time doing something purposeful and meaningful with my degree and my experience in school guidance.



What do you like about GA?

I like everything about Grace Academy! I like the way each girl is made to feel special and important. I like its Sisterhood! The girls are always there for one another, they "have each other's backs" and are allowed the comfort of being themselves. I like the size of the school and the way the older girls look after the younger girls. I like the high bar that is set for the girls in terms of academics and behavior, and how the girls reach for that bar. I love that good manners, poise and etiquette are promoted, as well as Christian values. I love the uniforms and the way the girls add a bit of personal flare through their scarfs and headbands! I love the way each day starts out with Circle of Peace. I love the fact that the girls are learning hobbies and participating in sports after their academic day is done, and being exposed to all kinds of new experiences and opportunities through field trips on the weekends and their summer program. I love the warm, respectful relationship between the girls and their wonderful, dedicated teachers and administrative staff. There is a feeling of family at Grace Academy! With that family atmosphere, it seems that there is always a special occasion to be celebrated with the privileges and treats that they bring! Lastly, I love the way the girls are always encouraged and supported in the direction of their dreams.

Do you have any suggestions for people who may be interested in volunteering?

I would encourage anyone who has some time to offer to look into ways that they can be a part of Grace Academy. Whether it is sharing a hobby or interest, helping the girls with their studies as a tutor, supporting the school financially, or donating needed items, your help makes a difference in the lives of these young girls.

Bushnell Benefit a Great Success!!

Grace Academy's second annual Benefit, held at The Bushnell on May 15, was a tremendous success. The Benefit raised over \$150,000 after all expenses. The proceeds fulfill the school's long-term objectives: to provide an educational program that prepares underserved, urban girls for prestigious private and magnet high schools with ongoing support through the high school years leading to a college education. Visit the Grace Academy website to view photos from the event; a full report will appear in the Annual Report Fall issue.



Guests enjoy bidding on the exciting auction items led by auctioneer John Motley.



Chelsea Swain, Alison Swain, Gina Bolduc, Board Chair Wendy Allerton, and Theresa Anzaldúa enjoying the reception at the Benefit at The Bushnell.



Master of Ceremonies, Thea Montañez.



Paola Ocasio '13 shares stories of her success in high school.