



Pulse

of Palliser Regional Schools

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

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For those of us who have been around in education a while, we recognize Easter break as a turning point in the school year.

The weeks that follow Easter seem to speed up. Before we know

it, we find ourselves in the midst of Provincial Achievement Tests, diploma exams and graduations.

For many of our students, the weeks ahead begin a series of firsts and lasts, perhaps one last family vacation before leaving home for university, the last diploma exams, and the first time away from home.

Each of us in Palliser, whatever our job description, contributes in one way or

another to helping ensure our students are ready for the transition to adulthood.

We each bring something unique to the table, and we do this best when we are passionate about the role we play.

This month's Pulse speaks to individuals sharing their respective passions, whether music, financial literacy, career counselling or technology.

The difference Palliser staff can make in the life of a student often remains unknown to us, save for the lucky few who get that card of thanks or a visit from a former student years down the road. But I have no doubt the work we do each day can mean the world to our students. I hope this Easter, we each have some time to reflect on the good we do and the good still yet to come.

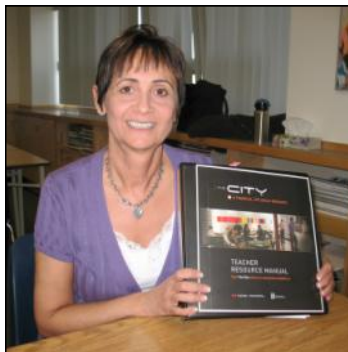
Kevin Gietz,
Superintendent of Schools

Cents & 'The City'

Like the savvy consumer she encourages her students to be, Lucy Johnson likes to do her homework before investing in any product or service. She wasn't about to leap on board the first time the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada came calling, asking her to be a teacher champion of the financial life skills resource.

She had to be convinced the resource, called "The City," was something she could believe in before she'd agree to teach it to her students and other teachers.

When she finally gave "The City" a chance, this teacher from Kate Andrews High School in Coaldale bought in, teaching it to every Grade 11 student in their Career and Life Management class, travelling to teachers' conventions, CTS and Health and Physical Education conferences, and offering webinar training to help other educators incorporate this tool into their



Lucy Johnson holds the binder for "The City."

Coaldale teacher is championing an effort to teach students money smarts

classrooms. She's one of just a dozen teacher champions across Canada helping spread the word. Any teacher who takes training with a teacher champion can access the resource for free.

"The City" features 11 modules, or lessons, which have curriculum connections to CALM, Applied Math 10 and 20, and other courses.

Developed initially by the British Columbia Securities

Commission, then tweaked and given a national profile by the FCAC, this resource has been identified by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty as one way to improve Canadians' financial literacy.

The federal push on the financial literacy front has Johnson's full support.

"It (The City) backed up everything I was trying to teach for 29 years," Johnson says. "Finally somebody's saying 'Yes, these kids need this.'"

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Congratulations, Gay

Coalhurst Elementary School learning assistant Gay Higginson is this month's Unsung Hero in recognition of how much she gives of her time and herself to children in the school's handbell and singing choirs.



Gay Higginson

"She is an amazing lady dedicated to providing musical opportunities for our students," says Principal Laurie Wilson. "Throughout the various music teachers, we have had our singing and handbell choirs as a constant because of Gay."

Gay says she's grateful to work at a school that's encouraged and enabled her to share her passion for music.

A long-time music teacher, Gay is proud of a long family musical history. Her great-grandfather travelled by horse and buggy in rural southern Alberta teaching piano.

Now in her 11th year at CES, Gay regularly works before school, during recess, noon hours and after school, whenever necessary, to help students prepare for festivals, plays or other performances. There are about 100 girls and boys in the three choirs at the school. All three are practising for a performance next month with the Lethbridge Symphony.

A former Anne Campbell Singer, Gay once sang on the steps of Parliament, and she dreams of taking the Coalhurst choirs to Edmonton to sing the anthem at the legislature. "We sing the greatest O Canada! They are just so proud, and I am proud of them," she says.

Gay, whose son Broc is Vice-Principal of R.I. Baker Middle School and whose daughter Nicole taught in Palliser, says every child can benefit from learning music.

As Palliser's Unsung Hero, Gay received a Palliser travel mug and a gift certificate to Moxie's. Congratulations, Gay!

If you'd like to nominate an Unsung Hero, write to pulse@pallisersd.ab.ca.

Banking on scholarship success

Donna Vecino, a Grade 12 student at Heritage Christian Academy in Calgary, has long planned on becoming a teacher, right after she spent a year doing mission work.

But earlier this year, out of the blue, she felt moved to visit her school's Career and Academic Counsellor, Shannon Foster, to talk about making an immediate transition to post-secondary.

It was a fateful meeting. A deadline was days away for an academic scholarship at Ambrose University College in Calgary.

"It was due that week," Donna says. "My life changed in that day."

With Foster's help, Donna applied. She won the academic scholarship and was invited to Ambrose to interview for the Presidential Scholarship, an award valued at about \$8,500 a year for four years, covering every penny of her tuition.

Last month, Donna spent an intensive couple of days at the university, getting an orientation, being interviewed, and in a gruelling 90-minutes, cranking out two essays without any advance preparation.

The work was well worth it. She won the full ride. She's now applying for more scholarships to help cover the cost of living in residence.

At Ambrose, Donna hopes to earn a bachelor's degree in arts or science. She'll then move on to her teaching degree, either at Ambrose or at the University of Lethbridge.

Foster says she always encourages her students to apply, apply and apply. She also offers some simple rules for optimizing a student's "scholarship potential."



Donna Vecino

"Keep your marks, athletics, leadership and volunteer work at an outstanding level and continue to look for scholarships as you progress through your studies," she says.

Sherryl Loman, a Career and Academic Counsellor in Picture Butte, says students should start thinking about scholarships in Grade 11 so they're ready to hit deadlines in their senior year.

"Every person you talk to in school or post-secondary career counsellors or government, they all say the same thing: There's tons of money out there and it's available every step of the way."

Students have to be prepared for disappointment and frustration. Not every award fits every individual. But the time spent applying will be well worthwhile any time a scholarship is granted.

"I try telling my students, 'You know, even if your parents are paying for everything, that money will come back to you. Even if it's \$50 or \$200, it's money you didn't have yesterday. You've done the work. You are deserving of it.'"

While some awards are based on pure academic achievement, most are looking to reward students who demonstrate character.

"It's never too late to start. Join something," Loman advises.

Also, "Every single student should apply for the Rutherford Scholarship. Now it's easier than ever."

Loman's monthly newsletters include lists of upcoming scholarship deadlines. They can be found on the PBHS [website](#).



Mitchell VanDyk, a student teacher, works with Jane Boras on digital storytelling.

Tech day a success

Staff from four Palliser schools joined forces to offer a day of professional development on all matters of technology.

Dorothy Dalglish School in Picture Butte was the gathering spot for Tech Day, March 12. Teaching staff there were joined by colleagues from Huntsville School, Picture Butte High School, and a handful of staff from Jennie Emery Elementary in Coaldale, for PD on everything from Smart boards to digital storytelling.

The division's technology staff led some sessions, while others made use of experts from within the schools themselves.

Technology wasn't just the topic of the day. It was also showcased in how the sessions were offered. The Google Earth session was led by an educator in Scotland, using videoconferencing.

Dorothy Dalglish Principal Jason Neville says this collaborative day was overwhelmingly well received, according to evaluations by participants.

By joining forces and offering a variety of sessions tailored to skill levels ranging from beginner to advanced, the schools were able to ensure every session provided something useful to meet teachers' needs, Neville said.

The City

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In 2008, Johnson became the first teacher in Alberta to use "The City," but she hopes in time, every student in Alberta will be on the program. The opportunity for that could be when Alberta Education revamps CALM into a new wellness program.

"I have a passion for financial literacy," Johnson says. "Every high school student should take a financial literacy course."

"The City" includes video segments, accessible online, which introduce students to a cast of eight characters of a variety of

ages and financial situations. Through the characters, students can discuss a particular financial issue without having to discuss their own private circumstances.

Each module includes an activity that may well involve the student digging through his/her own financial situation.

In one activity, the class has to figure out how long it will take to pay off an iPod, purchased with a credit card, by making only the minimum payment.

The resource also covers identify theft and credit card fraud. Many students on Facebook, for example, didn't realize posting their birthday information on

the social networking site left them vulnerable to fraud.

In another module, students go through a "Reality Lifestyle Check," and determine just what it will cost them to live on their own. Because the resource can be accessed online, it can be kept current with the latest costs factored in. The process covers everything from utilities and rent to entertainment expenses like pedicures. Students can factor in the entry level wage of the occupation they hope to pursue and then see just how much (or how little) money they'd be left with each month.

For some students whose parents have looked after every

expense, it's a real wake-up call.

Another module covers investments from the simple savings account to T-bills, bonds and stocks, all the kind of information that might help them avoid highly publicized investment schemes that have burned so many consumers who didn't understand the risks they were taking with their nest eggs.

By the time a student completes "The City," they'll have an entire personal financial plan completed to help guide them as they leave home or pursue post-secondary.

"I've had parents say to me, 'Why didn't they teach me this in high school?'"